

DECOLONIZING NUNAVUT'S ART MARKET

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## ABSTRACT

An Indigenous methodological framework of decolonization and Indigenization must support an Inuit-led revitalization of the declining arts and crafts sector in Nunavut. Arts and crafts express oral tradition, personal narratives, and Inuit worldviews and transfer those values intergenerationally. As Inuit Elder Shirley Tagalik argues, the transmission of Inuit traditional knowledge (*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*) through artistic expression plays a vital role in communities by promoting a culturally healthy society that is key to Inuit survival. By fusing Indigenous cultural heritage and new media technologies to centralize artwork, storytelling, and worldviews, the Inuit futurisms movement is contesting the digital divide that sustains a persistent colonial narrative of Arctic history. Decolonizing and Indigenizing information and communication technologies (ICT) strengthens Inuit engagement in rewriting the past, controlling the dissemination of stories and traditional knowledge, and creating a unified vision of their future.

Inuit leaders and representative organizations have been calling for federally supported Inuit-developed frameworks for advanced ICT innovation to meet the needs of communities. At issue is the question, “How can community-first ICT policies and infrastructure disrupt the *status quo* of the declining colonial Inuit art market in Nunavut?” First-mile infrastructure development and equitable high-speed broadband, which do not currently exist in the territory, are required to promote and support Inuit culture. By placing ownership and control of broadband infrastructure within Inuit communities — and thus the arts economy — decolonization, self-determination, cultural sovereignty, and Inuit-led economic advancement will occur in Nunavut.

This dissertation explores how equitable, affordable, and accessible ICT innovation reinforced by community-first strategic development policies supports expansion in the Inuit art market. Only by positioning Nunavut at the forefront of ICT access will Indigenous Nunavummiut artists be able to leverage digital tools to create works, organize for collective action, and engage in global markets. Creative solutions designed by and for Inuit communities living in remote and isolated locations are ultimately essential for achieving growth in the Inuit arts and crafts sector in Nunavut.

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This project proposal, ethics, and methodology has been reviewed and approved by the Nunavut Research Institute (Scientific Research License #01 008 16R-M), the York University Faculty of Graduate Studies, the York University Ethics Review Committee, and the Aboriginal Research Ethics Review Advisory Group at York University.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“... Inuit art—including everything from the earliest archaeological findings to contemporary works—has been almost entirely interpreted by *Qallunaat* [non-Inuit peoples]. Therefore, despite the rich literature, often written by those who have worked closely with Inuit artists over the last seven decades of the modern and contemporary arts industry (since 1948), the existing scholarship still represents a deep imbalance between who is being written about and who is writing.”

Dr. Heather Igloliorte,

*Curating Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit: Inuit Knowledge in the Qallunaat Art Museum*

Inequitable access to broadband caused by expensive, unreliable, and outdated satellite-only communications infrastructure prohibits the growth of cultural entrepreneurship in Arctic communities. Innovation in information and communication technologies (ICT) is intrinsically linked to the future development of the art market in Nunavut. Access to high-speed communication systems, designed by and for Inuit communities, will enable artists to organize for collective action against the constraints of colonialism, build digital tools for innovation in the arts industry in Nunavut, and further engage in global networks and new markets. Colonialism has historically impacted every aspect of Inuit life, but since the 1940s the Canadian government's interference with traditional Inuit culture has been so extensive that Inuit have faced a sea of change and adaptation. Since the 1970s when Inuit Tapirit Kanatami (ITK), originally named Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, was established as the national representational body for Inuit, Canada's Arctic Indigenous peoples have been mobilizing to retake control of their homelands and destiny, including cultural self-

determination and representation such as authorship of their own stories. Inuit visual art shares traditional histories through visual storytelling, giving the next generation insight into their collective cultural tradition and future in today's world. In her article "'No History of Colonialism' Decolonizing Practices in Indigenous Arts," Inuk art historian Dr. Heather Igloliorte discusses the ways in which Indigenous artists manifest cultural continuity through the visual arts (*Decolonize me, Decolonisez-moi* 21). Igloliorte states, "For the majority of Indigenous populations around the world, the undoing of colonialism is integral to our individual and collective quest for self-determination" (6). A step towards achieving sovereignty and sustainability through an Inuit worldview, as Igloliorte asserts, is to dismantle the political, historical, and technological ties that conform Inuit visual art to Westernized systems of production and distribution. can only be achieved through decolonization and Indigenization.

Indigenization is the process of making existing policies, infrastructures, and institutions more inclusive of the worldviews of Indigenous peoples by increasing their participation and leadership in decision-making positions. As Ngāti Awa Māori iwi scholar and professor of Indigenous education Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, "[Indigenization is] a centering in consciousness of the landscapes, images, languages, themes, metaphors, and stories of the Indigenous world, and the disconnecting of the many cultural ties between the settler society and its metropolitan homeland" (147). As Smith describes, the project of Indigenization involves collaboration with non-Indigenous activists, intellectuals, and organizations. Alternatively, decolonization is defined as "to free from colonial status" (Merriam Webster). In his essay "Decolonize Me/Decolonisez-moi," Mohawk of the Six Nations curator, artist, and scholar Steve Loft

defines decolonization as “A liberatory politic ... a process of unbinding imperialist concepts of knowledge from Indigenous ones” (*Decolonize me, Decolonisez-moi* 81). Loft asserts that the process of decolonization happens “at all levels of Indigenous interaction: between ourselves and Indigenous peoples, and between ourselves and non-Indigenous communities and institutions” (*Decolonize me, Decolonisez-moi* 82). Instead of adding more Indigenous peoples to already existing structures, the decolonized framework of authority begins in the community and works its way outward. This process, which Smith outlines, is not a complete rejection of Western knowledge but places Western knowledge in the context of Indigenous worldviews, concerns, and needs. She explains the importance of “coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (40). In this vein, the goal of this dissertation is to disrupt the colonialist state of the Inuit art market and to suggest an alternative system that places ownership and control of broadband infrastructure — and thus the arts economy — within Inuit communities to support decolonization processes, self-determination, cultural sovereignty, and Inuit-led economic growth in Nunavut.

An analysis of the relationships between the Inuit art market and the development of capitalism in the Arctic reveals the ways in which slow, unreliable, and costly ICT have sustained colonial practices of regulation and marginalization in that region. Commercial development of the Inuit art market began in the late 1940s–1950s when southern administrators brought together existing non-Inuit organizations to establish and capitalize on an arts network around Arctic communities that included training, production, distribution, marketing, and sales. The 1950s saw the rise of a multi-



million-dollar arts industry that has lasted for over 70 years. According to the most recent economic analysis, the Inuit art market contributes over \$64 million to the Canadian gross domestic product. Of that figure, Nunavut contributes over \$37 million annually. Although a seemingly large aggregate sum, on average, each artist earns less than \$9,000 per year from art (Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy). Due to the high labour and time allocation of creating works, artists are not only earning limited income, but most are losing money by participating in the arts.

Furthermore, although economists have been noting a decline for over 10 years, very little has changed in the market infrastructure. Interestingly, the only source of distribution that has seen growth is direct-from-artist sales; this is largely due to innovations introduced to the sector by social media networking. Unfortunately, the high costs of shipping coupled with unreliable and expensive internet connections restrict expansion in this area. However, the growth in direct sales implies that sectoral development can be achieved by shifting to a community-first model based on Inuit traditional knowledge (*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, or IQ), which places communities at the centre of decision making, and supported by a strong internet infrastructure. The systems that are failing are not going to be fixed by public funding alone but by innovations in strategy, distribution, and methods introduced by and for the Inuit arts community. These innovations can only be achieved by decolonizing the market; shifting to a community-first, Inuit-created model that will support artistic movements

such as Inuit futurisms;<sup>1</sup> and ensuring that artists have access to the resources they need to experiment with new media. Through the lens of IQ, I emphasize the importance of Inuit artists for community health and wellbeing as well as the necessity of Inuit-developed technologies for enhancing economic and cultural opportunities. Inuit-developed technologies empower communities to reimagine their futures in the framework of Inuit worldview as part of the Indigenous or Inuit futurisms movement.

The Indigenous futurisms (IF) movement sharply counters a persistent colonial narrative of Indigenous histories by reorienting the incongruity between the colonizer and the colonized to engage new and imagined technologies and media towards “alterNative” futures (Gaertner, Dillon, Guzmán). Through the IF movement, artists centralize artwork, storytelling, and worldviews to conceive new futures of Indigenous empowerment by fusing cultural heritage and new media technology. This movement is a powerful influence for Indigenizing ICT, as constant digital innovation is quickly replacing the analogue with the digital. Inuit new media serves to amplify Inuit engagement in rewriting the past, sharing stories and traditional knowledge, and taking hold of how communities envision and lead the way into their futures. In the communities of Nunavut, IQ is the foundation of culture and central to resistance, cultural preservation, and Inuit futurisms.

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<sup>1</sup> “Indigenous futurisms” is a term coined by Grace L. Dillon, Anishinaabe Professor of Indigenous Nations Studies, in her book *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*.

An Indigenous methodological framework of decolonization and Indigenization must support an Inuit-led revitalization of the declining arts and crafts sector in Nunavut. Arts and crafts express oral tradition, personal narratives, and Inuit worldviews and transfer those values intergenerationally. Inuit Elder Shirley Tagalik argues that the transmission of Inuit traditional knowledge through artistic expression plays a vital role in communities by promoting a culturally healthy society. *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* is a living technology incorporated into every aspect of Inuit life. As Tagalik says, “For Inuit, being grounded in *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* supports personal wellness, but also contributes to a collective cultural sense of health and wellness which has sustained Inuit over generations” (1). *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* is the foundation of adaptation and innovation and is interwoven with Inuit futurisms through its incorporation with emerging technologies, policies, and communications.

*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* positions communities first; creates strong, robust cultural connections; and places the power of decision making in collaboration and discussion. As Inuit community leader Joe Karetak and geographer and cultural researcher Frank Tester describe in *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: What Inuit Have Always Known To Be True*, “In Inuit culture the application of principles is holistic, occurring through an integrated and mutually supporting system of beliefs, cultural practices and principle-based social processes. . . . It engages the environment, universe and spiritual realms as considerations of equal importance” (Karetak Loc. 369–371). *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* is transmitted through storytelling and exemplifies a path to living a collaborative and adaptive life built through the experiential knowledge of Arctic peoples spanning hundreds of years. The principles are as follows:

1. Working for the common good;
2. Respecting all living things;
3. Maintaining harmony and balance; and
4. Continually planning and preparing for the future.

*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* is achieved through the following societal values:

1. *Tunnganarniq* (fostering good spirits by being open, welcoming, and inclusive);
2. *Pijitsirniq* (serving one's family/community);
3. *Aajiqatigiinni* (decision making through discussion and consensus);
4. *Pilimmaksarniq/Pijariuqsarniq* (developing one's knowledge and skills);
5. *Piliriqatigiinni/Ikajuqtigiinni* (collaborating for the common good);
6. *Qanuqtuurniq* (problem solving through creativity and resourcefulness);
7. *Avatimik Kamattiarniq/Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq* (stewarding the ecosystem); and
8. *Inuuqatigiitsiarniq* (respecting others and relationships and caring for people) (Inuit Societal Values, Tagalik 2).

Inuit leaders apply the principles of IQ to equip future generations with knowledge and societal support structures to strengthen the wellbeing of communities and to ensure intergenerational cultural transference (Inuugatta Language Conference 9, Tagalik 7).

Dr. Margaret Kovach, who is of Plains Cree and Saulteaux ancestry and a member of Pasqua First Nation, has written extensively about Native/non-Native research relationships with and within Indigenous communities. Kovach defines Indigenous methodologies as approaches to research that comprehensively include Indigenous systems of knowledge and the social relations embedded within their production (Kovach 21). Because governmental policies, programs, and frameworks stem from recommendations within Westernized research, non-Indigenous academics impact Indigenous communities directly by failing to work collaboratively or incorporate Indigenous worldviews into their methodologies. The result is neo-colonialism. Kovach

states that only “Indigenous methodologies disrupt methodological homogeneity in research. . . . Indigenous research frameworks have the potential to improve relevance in policy and practice within Indigenous contexts” (Kovach 12–13). By utilizing an Indigenous methodological framework of foregrounding IQ in the context of this dissertation, I work directly with Inuit artists and community members to discuss their experiences with ICT as well as the role IQ plays in shaping new technologies to learn in what ways community-based ICT innovation would be relevant or even possible. To establish a framework of analyzing broadband development in Nunavut, I looked towards Inuit leaders and organizations for guidance and insight, specifically in regards to how Indigenized ICT supports Inuit cultural voices.

In recognition of Inuit worldviews and knowledge, I rely on Inuit Tapirit Kanatami and their publication the *National Inuit Strategy on Research* as a basis for my research practices. The strategy establishes five priority areas for research with Inuit communities. These areas include the following:

1. Advance Inuit governance in research;
2. Enhance the ethical conduct of research;
3. Align funding with Inuit research priorities;
4. Ensure Inuit access, ownership, and control over data and information; and
5. Build capacity for Inuit Nunangat research (28).

The achievement of an Inuit-owned internet infrastructure in Nunavut, which currently does not exist, aligns with these priority areas. As ITK president Natan Obed states, “This country isn’t complete yet. There still is a process to create equity within this country, especially for Inuit Nunangat, the Canadian Arctic, because we don’t have

the infrastructure that Canadians have. We don't have access to broadband, we only have fly-in, fly-out operations for most of the year for our communities and we don't have the necessary infrastructure to take advantage of Canada the way that most Canadians can" (Natan Obed on Inuit). First-mile — meaning Inuit-developed and community-based networks in Nunavut — would allow Inuit communities to have greater access to information, flow of communication, and public resources.

In particular, Inuit artists would be able to freely express and represent themselves online to reclaim their histories and create a strengthened cultural voice. Cree art theorist, curator, writer, new media practitioner, and performance artist Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew argues: "Indigenous digital artists around the world are deeply engaged with, and provide important contributions to interdisciplinary and cross-community dialogues about cultural self-determination. Their works explore and bear witness to the contemporary relevance of the histories of Indigenous oral cultures and profound connections to their widely varying lands. They also reveal the creative drive that is at the heart of Indigenous survival" (Maskegon-Iskwew 191). Inuit-owned ICT infrastructure would empower more community members to engage in research and make meaningful changes to national and international academic bodies whose policies continue to be rooted in colonial practices.

A particular focus of this dissertation is the fourth priority area of the *National Inuit Strategy on Research*, as mentioned above, which discusses a well-cited Indigenous methodology: the principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP). OCAP represents a First Peoples self-determination approach to research. Developed by the National Aboriginal Health Organization, "OCAP is forward-looking and

proactive. It opens up new avenues for the expression of self-determination and self-governance in the areas of research and information and provides a measure of hope for positive change” (OCAP 2). Ownership indicates that Indigenous communities are collective owners of their cultural information and knowledge. Control signifies that First Peoples have the right to control all aspects of research that may impact them in any way. Access refers to community entitlement to access their information and to make decisions regarding who can access Indigenous knowledge and to what end. Finally, possession provides First Peoples with a means for protecting their information against breach or misuse (OCAP 2, Gratton 164). These principles are respected throughout the research for this dissertation in both scope and method. The principles of OCAP are the foundation of Indigenous ICT infrastructure and determines how, when, and to what extent Indigenous content can be used and shared. Decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies support OCAP and are operationalized in this dissertation through foregrounding Inuit histories and IQ to argue for community-owned communications infrastructure in Nunavut.

In 2018, ITK released a statement on the impacts of colonial research on community members. “Inuit and other Indigenous peoples,” the report states, “have in the past been subjected to egregious abuses by researchers which has prompted the need for ethical guidelines that protect Indigenous peoples” (*National Inuit Strategy on Research* 23). Canadian Inuit and Inuit Nunangat (an Inuktitut term describing the Inuit homeland including land, water, and ice [ITK]) have become the most researched Indigenous population in recent history (*National Inuit Strategy on Research*). The expansive research on Inuit culture covers everything from relationships, care for the

land, culture, and art production to belief systems and ancestral histories. According to ITK, “the number of peer-reviewed publications and dissertations that focus on Inuit and Inuit Nunangat has increased at a rate higher than the increasing population of Inuit ... in 2011, for every three Inuit, there was one publication or dissertation”

(*National Inuit Strategy on Research* 17). The research benefits the lives of the individual or organization carrying it out, but that benefit rarely extends back to the communities, and it is even more rare that the research reaches the communities in Inuktitut. During a 2014 interview, George Dunkerly, former executive director of the Kablu Friendship Centre in Kangiqliniq (Rankin Inlet), stated,

You are probably the 12th or 13th group I have seen here in the last six months. The north seems to be the place for research right now but it never goes anywhere. I’ve done research projects on social development, abuse issues, elder issues and three years from now I will get a notice from the university that the research paper is done but nothing ever happens. It’s like it is research that is being done for the sake of research. The contacts we have had with the research arm of the government of Nunavut, everything is done so slowly. The information is compiled so slowly that by the time the research paper comes out it is so outdated that it is irrelevant now. (Dunkerly)

The taking of Inuit knowledge for the benefit of non-Inuit institutions has occurred throughout the long history of Arctic research, which has predominantly been conducted by non-Indigenous academics and organizations and, until relatively recently, without regulation. In her critical text *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Smith writes that it is difficult to discuss research methodology and Indigenous peoples “without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the



pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices” (2). As such, Smith focuses on the context and purpose of the research and its ramifications for the participants and communities, which for Nunavummiut extends back over three centuries.

The earliest writing on Inuit of the Canadian Arctic was published by Adam Olearius, a German scholar and geographer, in 1656. Subsequent academic writing about Inuit did not occur with any frequency until the mid to late 1800s when the Arctic opened to mass expeditions as a final frontier for exploration (Krupnik). British and European Arctic expeditions were concerned with what they could claim geographically or what resources they could extract as opposed to learning about Inuit culture.

Early Western accounts of Inuit were largely paternalistic descriptions. For example, British naval officer and Arctic explorer Sir John Ross (1777–1856) experienced four winters in the Arctic between 1829 and 1833. He wrote extensively about Inuit relations and culture through the lens of regulation and British law. Ross comments on the “daily communication and barter,” noting that “the officers were pleasantly surprised at the honesty of the Inuit. Though there were thefts from time to time, it was evident that the Inuit regarded it as a huge joke when they failed to get away with them. The speed with which the Inuit built their snow houses, the design of the passage entrance, and the use of an ice window to give light were much admired” (*Polar Pioneers* 142-143).<sup>2</sup> Exploration and writings about Inuit became so common that in 1871 Lewis Henry

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<sup>2</sup> Two men, John Ross and James Clark Ross, led the 1830 Arctic expedition referenced here.

Morgan, an American anthropologist and social theorist known as the principal founder of scientific anthropology, wrote, “the Eskimo<sup>3</sup> have been so frequently and so minutely described that very little can be added to the stock of existing information” (Krupnik 1). Interest in Arctic peoples, however, coincided with an even greater attraction to the Arctic’s natural resources.

A “happy, simple people” with useful knowledge of survival skills and of the land was how anthropologists described Inuit for well over a century. In fact, the intrigue of the “world’s [so-called] harshest environment” still captures the global imagination. The story of Franklin’s lost expedition, for example, has become one of the greatest Canadian mysteries in the history of the nation. The legend, as well as Franklin himself, have been immortalized in monuments, literature, art, and entertainment. As British naval historian Andrew Lambert claims, “The Franklin story is part of the fundamental mythos of the Royal Navy ... I was probably four or five when I came across Franklin” (Lambert). In 1845, renowned English Royal Navy captain Sir John Franklin led two ships, HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, on a mission with two objectives: the first was to search for the Northwest Passage, and the second was to conduct a magnetic survey of the North Pole (Lambert). In the second year of the voyage, the party reached their destination but became lodged in the ice. The ice did not open the following summer

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<sup>3</sup> An antiquated term commonly used in English literature and media until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century referring to the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic regions including Canada, America, Siberia, and Greenland. “Eskimo” is considered a derogatory term because it was widely used by non-Native colonizers including anthropologists and academics and thought to mean “eater of raw meat,” which implied primitivism of Arctic peoples (Hersher).

as expected, and as a result of exposure, disease, and starvation, the entire crew of 129 men was lost (Lambert).

To the rest of the world, the Franklin expedition seemed to have vanished into thin air; however, Inuit storytelling kept track of the locations of the wrecked vessels. Historian Louie Kamookak from Uqsuqtuuq (Gjoa Haven), the community closest to Franklin's ships, collected stories from elders about the lost expedition for over 30 years.

According to Inuit oral tradition, the two ships arrived in the area through the northwest side of King William Island. One vessel was destroyed by ice, and the other drifted south. Elders say that the latter floated for two years before it sank and that there may have been members of the crew alive during the first winter, but by the second winter all signs of life had disappeared (CBC News *Franklin find proves "Inuit oral history is strong"*). The book *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* published in 1992 quotes a piece of Inuit oral history told by a mapmaker named Qaqortingneq from Kugaaruk (Pelly Bay), Nunavut concerning the fate of the ships:

Two brothers were out hunting seal to the northwest of Qeqertaq (King William Island). It was in the spring, at the time when the snow melts about the breathing holes of the seal. They caught sight of something far out on the ice; a great black mass of something, that could not be any animal they knew. They studied it and made out at last that it was a great ship. . . . At first, they were afraid to go down into the lower part of the ship, but after a while they grew bolder, and ventured also into the houses underneath. Here they found many dead men, lying in the sleeping places there; all dead. . . . In the same year, later on in the spring, three men were on their way from Qeqertaq to the southward, going to hunt caribou calves. And they found a boat with the dead bodies of six men. There were knives and guns in the boat, and much food also, so the men must have died of disease. (Petrone 31)

Relying on Inuit oral histories such as the one told by Qaqortingneq, in 2008 Kamookak consulted with a search team from Parks Canada, and they eventually located both vessels in 2014 and 2016. Parks Canada and the Government of Nunavut acknowledged that without Inuit knowledge, Franklin's ships may never have been found (CBC News *Franklin find proves "Inuit oral history is strong"*). However, the details of how each man died and what they experienced continues to be shrouded in myth and mystery.

Historian Shane McCorristine describes the Franklin expedition as one of the greatest ghost stories in the history of exploration. The story has become a cultural phenomenon that has inspired generations of Canadians to imagine for themselves the colonial narrative of "the perilous frozen land" and to claim the history of the Arctic and its peoples as national intellectual property. The story has become more than a tale; it has become a part of Canadian identity, as McCorristine demonstrates: "If the North has functioned in Canada as a grand national myth for the past century – the 'True North, Strong and Free' – an idea more than a location, then this disaster occupies a central role in the way that the nation deals with its Arctic possessions" (McCorristine 202). The latest reimagining of the expedition is the 2017 AMC television series *The Terror*. Slated as a suspenseful drama, the dark horror series tells the tale of a crew "frozen, isolated and stuck at the end of the earth, in a place that wants them dead" (The Terror). By contrast, Inuk journalist and artist Alootook Ipellie (1951–2007) identified the Canadian national romanticism of the Arctic in 1992. Ipellie describes the expeditions as follows:

They ventured into a landscape that hardly a soul in the civilized world knew about, a land neglected for centuries and thought to be uninhabited. The harsh reality of Arctic conditions got in the way of would-be discoverers. Still, they came, year after year, perhaps spurred on by the added curiosity of finding the strange lands peopled by ‘savages’ or what other later called ‘scraelings’, which translated as ‘barbarians’ or possibly ‘pygmies’. The term may also have implied the supernatural qualities of gnomes and trolls.

Ipellie elaborates on Western ignorance of Inuit, noting the colonial fascination with Inuit culture during the initial period of contact:

[T]he explorers had no idea why the Inuit lived where they lived or how they developed their ice culture. They could only speculate about why Inuit chose to live in a land so desolate that no other culture had ever touched it. But the Inuit had learned to hunt on the icy seas, to burn blubber, to make shelter from snow, and to sew clothes from the skins of wild game. The tools they invented were marvels of adaptability to the external conditions they faced each day. (39–40)

Many publications discuss the degrading treatment of Inuit that occurred as colonialism became established in the Arctic. In a 1912 *New York Times* article entitled “Back, Without Gold from Baffin’s Bay,” a Mr. A. W. ‘Lucky’ Scott — the expedition leader of the now defunct Northern Ventures Limited — writes, “We brought back between \$10,000 and \$15,000 worth of furs, 3,000 pounds of ivory, which is worth \$2 a pound; 250 pounds of right whalebone, worth \$3 a pound; about 100 white and blue fox skins, 5,500 feet of moving-picture films, and 1,600 photographs. . . . But what I do want to say is that everybody who has gone up there and traded with the Eskimos has robbed them, and I will exclude none.” Inuk author Mini Aodla Freeman discusses the

colonial treatment of Inuit by even the most well-intentioned and understanding of southern workers, offering a compelling point of view:

One day, the *qallunaaq* in the North decides to go with the hunter and his dog team. On the whole, he enjoys it all ... For the first time, he sees the Inuk as a capable person. In fact, he is very amazed by what the Inuk can put up with. He begins to invite him to his home. While talking with him, he begins to find out a lot of things about how the Inuk lives in his own home, and what kinds of ways he uses. He begins to understand the full meaning of his language. He asks him to carve for him — the carving has a meaning itself and the Inuk explains what the carving is doing. He realizes for the first time that the carving speaks like the art work in the South. . . . His manner changes towards the Inuk—he no longer hurries, and even his posture is no longer like a stiff, frozen seal. It has become thawed, warm, and the Inuk realizes he too is human after all. (Freeman Loc 1050–1089)

Freeman continues, commenting on how the administrator returns to southern Canada and, for a time, his worldview has shifted. However, this change in perspective is not permanent:

In the South again, the *qallunaaq* is very friendly — he no longer walks like he is carrying a heavy load. . . . Sitting with his colleagues, he listens to their big plans for the North. There will be a new runway for aircraft, a new school building, a new administration building, new quarters for the *qallunaat* who are employed there, a new home economist to teach Inuit how to be clean and to show them how to wash and prepare meals, new ways to bring the Inuit children in to the school, to have soup served during the lunch hours, new community affairs, a survival course for the new *qallunaat* who are to go north. There is no mention of a new way to teach Inuit how to cope with their changing lives, how to cope with liquor, how to cope with a working husband, how to plan their spending now that he is no longer a hunter. There is no mention why Inuit children have to be taught the English language, or why there is income tax. So many things the *qallunaat* have introduced to the simple Inuk. (Freeman Loc 1050–1089)

As the excerpt from Freeman's book illustrates, although the attitudes of an individual southerner could be sensitive to Inuit needs, a sole researcher or government worker did not, or could not, change the force of the state or help Inuit on a large scale confront the great cultural changes that were occurring. The relationship of researchers working with Inuit is an endless cycle of taking knowledge away from communities and establishing colonial laws and regulations. Furthermore, media representation of Inuit was racist and possessive. Art created by Inuit was treated as craft – products to be sold as trade – instead of cultural expression. Artist and curator Taqralik Partridge powerfully comments on themes of racism and representation in the 2018 exhibition *Tunirrusiangit: Kenojuak Ashevak & Tim Pitsiulak* held at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Partridge built a *qarmaq* (a traditional sod house) plastered from end-to-end in archival newspaper articles about the north. Her work visualizes the breadth of racist reporting and media coverage on Inuit people, symbolizing how intertwined the language of the past is with Inuit heritage.



Figure 1.1. Partridge, Taqralik. *Qarmaq* (a traditional sod house) plastered in newspaper articles. 2018. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Photo courtesy of the Mobilizing Inuit Cultural Heritage Project, 18 June 2018.

Inuit representation in southern (i.e., non-Inuit) media and institutions is, as Partridge explains, evidence of systemic colonialism: “from the handling, owning, keeping, showing and not showing of objects. It’s even reflected in the way the labels are written to the way the pieces are presented. It’s all these different parts that we come up against. Indigenous art has been considered the mascot of Canada — we pull it out every time there’s an Olympics and we have it in the airport in Vancouver. As far as taking it seriously as the real heritage of this land and these people, it’s always been commodified and not seen as art” (Commanda). *Tunirrusiangit* is one of the first major



exhibitions curated by Inuit artists and marks a significant shift in Indigenous self-representation in a major cultural art institution.

## **Methodology**

As described in the *National Inuit Strategy on Research*, Inuit communities are attempting to increase infrastructure capacity in the north to facilitate Inuit-led research and collaborate with institutions to remodel the colonial framework of research into partnerships based on Inuit self-determination and transparency (33–35). Universities are recognizing the history of unethical treatment of Inuit and other Indigenous groups through more rigorous and inclusive academic policies. In the publication *Guidelines for Research Involving Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples*, York University addresses problematic approaches to research through stringent culturally appropriate protocols and intensive training. Training includes an online ethics course with an examination that must be passed in order to be certified, as well as methodology workshops with Indigenous communities and faculty. The foremost principle for research with Indigenous peoples at York is community engagement. All projects are required to focus on elements of capacity building within communities. When engaging in projects, researchers are not only required to collaborate with First Peoples representative bodies and organizations, but to respect Indigenous governing authorities. Researchers must have a plan and ethical protocol approved by the Aboriginal Research Ethics Review Advisory Group and must be transparent in their processing of

intellectual property, data, and the dissemination of results before beginning their research<sup>4</sup> (York University).

The research results that appear in this dissertation are based on personal and published interviews with Inuit artists, politicians, and information technology specialists living in and outside of communities in Nunavut. Prior to my contacting community members, my ethics protocol and informed consent form were reviewed and subsequently approved by the Aboriginal Research Ethics Review Advisory Group at York University. Before approving my project, the advisory group requested I address the following concerns from the community:

1. The committee asks that you reconsider the destruction of data after completion of your dissertation. Perhaps indicate that the anonymized data may be used for future research-related purposes similar in nature to the current research project.

Answer: In small remote or isolated communities, nuances in anonymized data have the ability to reveal the identity of the parties involved in the study. It is crucial that the participants in my research know how their data is being used. If I open the data to future projects, it will be extremely difficult for the participants who live in areas of low connectivity to track their data. To make anonymized data available to future research projects would be a disservice to the trust of my participants and the security of their information. My research is a context-driven process. I am completely transparent with my research participants. It is important that they know where the information

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<sup>4</sup> The York University Aboriginal Research Ethics Review Advisory Group was formalized in 2011 to advise research ethics policies and procedures and make recommendations to university researchers. The group is comprised of Indigenous researchers, students, and scholars representing a variety of communities. The advisory group recognizes the complex nature of research within Indigenous communities and ensures “that appropriate sensitivity to cultural and community rights, roles and responsibilities are employed in all research projects conducted under the auspices of York University, Research Ethics Review Guidelines for Research Involving Aboriginal People” (Research Involving Human Participants, Senate Policy).

they are sharing will be used and have access to the final report once I am finished.

2. The committee noted that you will be referring corporations/internet providers to the Northern First Nations, Inuit communities, and municipalities. There is the possibility that the First Nations/Inuit parties may perceive the researcher to be endorsing these companies. How will this be addressed?

Answer: My research is based on the theory of creating a sustainable, first-mile, culture-based broadband infrastructure. I will be gaining information about the construction of a network and exploring the potential conflicts without endorsing any particular company or attempting to bring anyone to the negotiation table.

I will not be referring corporations or internet providers to communities or vice versa. I will be choosing my participants based on their connection to either the arts or the establishment of broadband in local communities, regardless of who their internet service provider is. I will be interviewing members of corporations and of the territorial government on topics related to Nunavut Territory broadband. Questions I will be asking corporate entities surround policy and technology, such as how to get information about how the northern networks were established, who determines the policies on Arctic speed and usage caps, how future networks might be created, etc. I will not be endorsing government strategy or any type of corporate program.

3. The committee noted that government officials involved with establishing ICT in the Arctic in the study likewise blurs the boundary between research and intervention, which may compromise the ethics protocol. Please comment accordingly.

Answer: Although I will be advocating for Inuit-owned infrastructure through my writing, I will not be proposing or endorsing companies to construct the network in any way. I will be researching the positive and negative aspects of current connectivity projects but not categorizing any one company or product as a solution. The solution to the broadband issues lies in the hands of Inuit. My role is not to promote companies but to explain the political and corporate influences and the process of a first-mile approach to the establishment of a high-speed network.

4. Please clarify that the data on the computer will be password-protected.

Answer: Yes, the data on the computer is password-protected.

5. Clarify for how long the data will be securely stored and what will happen to the data after the retention period.

The data retention period for this project is up to 10 years after the completion of the dissertation, during which the data will be stored on a password-protected digital device. After 10 years the data will be destroyed, which is a policy that I have added to the consent form.

My ethics protocol was subsequently approved. In addition, my ethics protocol and research plan were submitted to the Nunavut Research Institute (NRI). The NRI is responsible for licensing research in the health, natural, and social science disciplines as required under Nunavut's Scientists Act, as well as providing mentorship, guidance, and support to scientists working throughout the territory. The NRI ensures that Nunavummiut are consulted and engaged in all research undertaken in Nunavut and arranges partnerships between research projects and the needs of Inuit communities (Nunavut Research Institute). After reviewing my ethics protocol and project proposal in both English and Inuktitut, the NRI granted a research license for work in Nunavut.<sup>5</sup> My interview consent forms were made available to all Inuit interviewees in Inuktitut and English.

The community members that I requested interviews with were selected because of their experience with or knowledge of ICT and/or connection to the art market in Nunavut. I engaged in three weeklong research trips to Kangiqliniq (Rankin Inlet) and Iqaluit in October 2014, Qamani'tuaq (Baker Lake) in June/July 2015, and Iqaluit and

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<sup>5</sup> The Nunavut Research Institute License number for this dissertation research is 01 036 14N-M-Amended.

Kinngait (Cape Dorset) in October 2016 in addition to the primary research I led in Toronto. Overall, I conducted 30 interviews, which I have divided into four categories: artists, arts administrators, internet administrators, and community administrators. The most important, and perhaps the most sensitive, were the 13 interviews with artists. Each interview varied in length, ranging from 30 minutes to three hours depending on how much the artist wanted to discuss and how comfortable he/she was sharing information with me. One of the most important takeaways from these interviews was that every artist I talked to wanted the market to improve and be more lucrative for the entire community. However, not all artists were interested in digital arts or online marketing. Artists that I interviewed who had been working in the Co-op system for the majority of their career seemed more interested in the community having online access but did not see it as a vital tool for their personal work. One anonymous artist shared the following:

I don't [sell work outside the local arts centre] because I learned a lot in this program. It is nice if I try to sell my work globally but if I try to sell locally, it is not going to look too good for me to sell my work outside [the centre]. I know that money is always hard up [North], it is so remote, things are expensive, but then for my reputation, even for how hard I want to get groceries and pay bills ... I won't street sell or sell on the internet. . . . I [use the internet] when I get a chance but I don't have access or a computer. I have grandchildren to look after so I don't spend too much time on the internet. (Anonymous Interview 1)

Alternatively, artists who are exploring new media or just starting out in their careers tended to view internet access as an essential tool for art creation. Similarly, interviewees falling within the other three categories – arts administrators, internet administrators, and community administrators – all regarded internet access as an important tool for the growth of the arts market and community health. In an interview

with Ellen Hamilton, artist and executive director of Qaggiavuut!, a performing arts society in Nunavut, she stated,

The biggest challenge [facing Northern artists] is getting yourself marketed, out there, and finding ways of getting opportunities to work and perform. A lot of our people don't necessarily have access to internet and websites and all of that. So, one of Qaggiavuut's roles is to help make a connection between the artists and the world so that we can get people, not only to the next stage and level of their performing abilities, but to get them out there working, and performing. . . . [Sharing performances on YouTube is challenging because people don't have the internet]. One of the things we are doing right now to just communicate with people if they are not on the internet is that we are starting to do podcasts and send those podcasts out to community radio stations so that they start airing our information, live performances, and also news about what we are doing so we can really get out there. Not everybody is going to be on Facebook.  
(Interview with Ellen Hamilton)

Each of the administrators, such as Oana Spinu, Executive Director of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corporation; David Ford, Manager of the Jesse Oonark Centre; Lorraine Ningeocheak, Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreement Coordinator for the Kivalliq Inuit Association; Eric Corneau, former Dean of Nunavut Arctic College; and Alysa Procida, Executive Director of the Inuit Art Foundation, among others, were advocates for the implementation of affordable, equitable high-speed internet connections in communities. These interviews were used to provide a historical analysis of the development of both the Inuit art market and broadband infrastructure in Nunavut to demonstrate that decolonized processes can support self-determination, cultural sovereignty, and economic growth in the region.

In addition to interviews, I worked on short-term projects with southern Inuit arts organizations. The first was a six-month project with the Inuit Art Foundation to assist with the creation of the Inuit Artists Database (<https://iad.inuitartfoundation.org>), a

website used to showcase and search for biographies of Inuit artists. My role in this project was to work with foundation staff, Inuit artists, and other cultural institutions to coordinate the creation of a dynamic, flexible database that meets the changing needs of users in both high and low-bandwidth locations. I wrote and distributed a request for proposal to development companies, facilitated interviews, kept track of the progress of the build, and managed testing and feedback processes. I coordinated the data population of the database with biographical profiles of Inuit artists from across Canada in order to highlight their contributions to Canada's national artistic heritage and Inuit self-determination. For the second project, I worked with the Canadian Arctic Producers for seven months to digitize an archive from the Uluhaktok (Holman) print studio. In both of these projects I engaged directly with the Inuit arts community and received feedback on specific digital and bandwidth restrictions and individual needs.

## **Chapter Synopsis**

This thesis explores the question, "How can community-first ICT policies and infrastructure disrupt the *status quo* of the declining Inuit art market in Nunavut?" Through this dissertation I analyze the colonial history of the Inuit art market and suggest an alternative system that utilizes first-mile infrastructure development and equitable high-speed broadband as a vehicle to promote and support Inuit artists working in new media, in particular those producing works within the Inuit futurisms framework. Decolonization, self-determination, cultural sovereignty, and Inuit-led

economic growth in Nunavut will occur when Inuit communities own and control broadband infrastructure and, by extension, the arts economy.

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 discusses how Inuit artists who identify with Nunavut are engaging in emerging technologies as platforms of cultural expression through the Indigenous or Inuit futurisms movement. Indigenous futurisms aims to centralize Indigenous artwork, storytelling, and worldviews through new media technologies that reshape and decolonize ICT. The artists profiled in this chapter, such as Couzyn van Heuvelen and Ruben Anton Komangapik, are finding ways to merge important aspects of Inuit culture such as hunting and carving with new technologies, playing with the role of tradition in new creation methods in the contemporary landscape. Nyla Innuksuk and Jesse Tungilik experiment with new technologies to make important comments on contemporary Inuit and Indigenous life. The artist collective Mittimatalik Arnait Miqusuqtuit collaborates to document and disseminate traditional skills and knowledge for the health, wellbeing, and longevity of Inuit culture. Each of these artists is curating a vision for the future of Nunavummiut, and each is uniquely adding to the Inuit futurisms movement.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature and debates surrounding the cultural impacts of ICT and the dominance of Western culture streaming into Indigenous communities. Although Western media promotes capitalism and colonialist ideologies, Indigenous communities use ICT to strengthen cultural ties within and outside of local environments. Furthermore, the creation and dissemination of Indigenous digital content reflects social values and knowledge and pushes back on the boundaries of colonialism. Chapter 4 explores these themes in Inuit communities through a case



study on the #sealfie movement. Through social media platforms such as Facebook, Inuit activists are leveraging art to reframe the conversation about Arctic life and culture. Although challenged by limited connectivity, #sealfie demonstrates that content generated by community members provides culturally strengthening opportunities to communicate with local, national, and international networks.

In Chapter 5, I critically analyze the problematic contexts of the Western historical narrative and highlight Inuit perspectives on the extensive impacts of colonialism. This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the impacts of the creation narrative of the art market in Nunavut as the pinnacle of colonial practice in the region and explores southern representation of Nunavummiut artists over the last 70 years. This analysis highlights the incredible power of artists confronting change – particularly those engaged with the Inuit futurisms movement. Chapter 6 builds on this historiography to discuss the current value and earning potential of the Inuit art market in Nunavut in the context of the history of the market as well as the greater economic picture. The art market is not only founded upon capitalist Euro-Canadian systems of distribution and promotion, but on colonial ideals and theories of “art” and its “value” that clash with Inuit principles of IQ. Whether they are working within or outside of the contemporary market, Inuit artists are participating in a non-Indigenous economy, which influences their potential for innovation and leadership. Although change has been incredibly slow, there are initiatives that are currently being developed by the Inuit Art Foundation in the interest of Inuit. One such initiative is the Igloo Tag program, which I use as a case study to highlight how the history and current economic situation of the art market are joined through new visions of the future. Although the Igloo Tag stems from colonial

histories and is still being managed from a southern location, it arguably represents mechanisms of Inuit self-determination and market control via brand name recognition and authority over intellectual property rights of Inuit arts.

Finally, in Chapter 7 I discuss how slow, unreliable, and expensive internet connectivity prevents Inuit artists from fully participating in the broader national and international art markets or locally experimenting with new media formats of expression. Current digital and economic disparities experienced in Nunavut prohibit entrepreneurial growth and restrict artists' access to valuable economic and educational resources. Since the arrival of the internet in 1995, connectivity in the Arctic has been achieved through a litany of short-term governmental initiatives. From high-cost federal grant programs to grassroots non-profit goals, no one entity has been able to achieve equitable access to the internet in the Arctic. Innovative technological developments have created the means to deploy high-speed broadband and ever-increasing cellular network speed. The overwhelming cost of implementing such technologies in the Arctic community has an estimated range from millions to billions of dollars. In this chapter, I analyze how equitable, first-mile broadband in Nunavut could support rapid decolonization of the Inuit art market through bolstering community-first initiatives and empowering community voices.

To fully support IQ and decolonization efforts, networks need to be owned and controlled by Inuit communities who develop and distribute Inuit content. As Loft argues, Indigenous cultures relate to the web as a physical space: "For Indigenous people the 'media landscape' becomes just that: a landscape, replete with life and spirit, inclusive of beings, thought, prophecy, and the underlying connectedness of all

things – a space that mirrors, memorializes, and points to the structure of Indigenous thought” (*Coded Territories: Tracing Indigenous Pathways in New Media Art* xvi). Inuit-owned and controlled internet infrastructure would support a digital realm of IQ and bolster community knowledge transference and culture across generations. It would also realize equitable access to global entrepreneurship for Inuit through connectedness to new markets.

To conclude, I summarize three recommendations for achieving decolonization in the Inuit art market in Nunavut. First, I propose that the Canadian federal government invest as much in Inuit-led, long-term ICT policy development as it does in out-dated southern-based infrastructure. The federal government has invested approximately \$750 million in territorial communications infrastructure over two decades (Proctor). However, there is not a policy for ICT development in Nunavut, which is needed to make strategic investments in infrastructure that further Inuit goals, as argued by the Nunavut Broadband Development Corporation (Sahar Zerehi). If equal investments were made in Inuit-led communication policy development, Nunavummiut would have the financial support they need to create a shared vision regarding infrastructure through a lasting ICT strategy, which currently does not exist. Secondly, Indigenous Nunavummiut should occupy all federal positions that represent Nunavummiut voices. There are important positions at the highest levels of government, including in the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Department of Canadian Heritage, that make decisions on behalf of Nunavut and Inuit culture but are not filled by Inuit. Inuit representation in these powerful bodies, as outlined in the publication *A New Approach to Economic*

*Development in Nunavut*, would ensure that economic development, especially cultural and infrastructure development policies, would be guided by IQ, an approach that would guarantee that an Inuit worldview is applied to decisions and actions that influence Inuit lives (Qikiqtani Inuit Association 3).

Finally, first-mile, equitable, affordable, high-speed broadband should be constructed in Nunavut so that Inuit artists can be free to experiment with new media, especially Inuit futurisms, within their communities and directly engage with opportunities of economic growth, including training on the latest available applications and technologies. As a consequence of the high cost of ICT coupled with stagnant technological and administrative innovation, the art market has failed to grow over the last decade, leaving the Nunavut Inuit arts and crafts sector in stasis. Without reliable, low-cost internet connections and sectoral support for Inuit artists working in new media, colonial control of the arts in Nunavut will continue. Only by positioning Nunavut at the forefront of ICT access will Nunavummiut artists be able to leverage digital tools to create works, to organize for collective action, and to engage in global interactions. Creative solutions designed by and for Inuit communities living in remote and isolated locations are required to achieve decolonization, control, and growth in the Inuit arts and crafts sector in Nunavut.

## CHAPTER 2: INUIT FUTURISMS

In a globalized and connected world, the Indigenous futurisms movement is sharply responding to the digital divide that sustains a persistent colonial narrative of Inuit history. Indigenous futurisms visualize and will actualize a new future by merging Indigenous cultural heritage and new media technologies to centralize Indigenous artwork, storytelling, and worldviews. Nunavummiut artists are engaging in emerging technologies – often from southern locations due to connectivity restrictions – as platforms of cultural expression through the Indigenous or Inuit futurisms movement. Indigenous futurisms disrupt the parameters of the art market through new media technologies that reshape, indigenize, and decolonize ICT. As such, Inuit futurisms are key to revitalizing the arts and crafts market in Nunavut.

Anishinaabe author and academic Grace L. Dillon broke new ground in her 2012 text *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, in which she connects “alterNative” realities with the imagining of Indigenous futurisms. AlterNative realities are based in science fiction writing where Indigenous authors play with space and time to create narratives that reimagine the past and present. Dillon asserts that alterNative realities provide a way for Indigenous artists and authors to “renew, recover, and extend” their voices and traditions in fusing “Indigenous sciences with the latest scientific theories available in public discourse,” which can undercut the boundaries of Western science (2). For Dillon, the marriage of Indigenous worldviews with Western technologies that defines IF changes the scope of what is possible. Indigenous futurisms restructure the dominant worldview, introducing new technologies and

frameworks of innovation. In IF, Indigenous knowledge does not merely sit on the margins of Western knowledge but becomes an integral part of the future global consciousness (3). In theorizing about this, Dillon draws on the work of Anishinaabe author, scholar, and activist Gerald Vizenor and his vision of Indigenous survivance.

In his book *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, Vizenor defines survivance as an active sense of presence over colonization and the narratives of cultural absence, uprooting, and oblivion (1). Survivance is a continuation of histories and a way to dynamically fight colonial narratives of erasure.<sup>6</sup> Vizenor writes, “The nature of survivance is unmistakable in Native stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions, and customs and is clearly observable in narrative resistance and personal attributes, such as the Native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage. The character of survivance creates a sense of Native presence over absence, vitality, and victimry” (1). Survivance is thus an integral aspect of IF, because it makes space for Indigenous artists to ground cultural resistance and resurgence in tradition while

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<sup>6</sup> During the development of the Inuit art market, the Government of Canada recognized that not only were there economic benefits to monetizing Inuit art, but the marketing of the art could boost the international recognition of the country. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the narrative in southern media and academic texts portrayed Inuit culture as one that was vanishing into colonialism. As medical anthropologist Ann McElroy writes in *Nunavut Generations: Change and Continuity in Canadian Inuit Communities*, “Part of the mythic quality of people perceived as primitive was the assumption that their cultures were timeless and unchanging, unlike the rapid change of Western civilization” (22). The narrative of erasure portrays Inuit as victims in need of rescue. In the name of “saving” a culture, art was used as a mechanism to solidify newly formed settlements and secure populations under state control (Sanaugait 9).

reimagining the future, redefining histories, centring worldviews, and responding to the world as it is as well as offering alternate realities (Nixon, Dillon).

### **Indigenous Futurisms: A Tool for Community-Led Technology Development**

Jason Edward Lewis, cofounder of the Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC) research group at Concordia University, builds on Indigenous futurisms in his article “A Better Dance and Better Prayers: Systems, Structures, and the Future Imaginary in Aboriginal New Media” (2014). Lewis describes the Indigenous future imaginary through which he calls for Indigenous communities and artists to creatively engage with new technologies in order to “consciously imagine ourselves in and into the far future” (58). Lewis notes that the vast majority of digital platforms are conceived and designed by non-Indigenous developers. Furthermore, these developers are largely Anglophones who code without considering alternative worldviews. They decide what knowledge is valuable, which platforms and products will operationalize that knowledge, and how that knowledge is to be leveraged in the world (61). To take this one step further, by supporting Indigenous first-mile ICT infrastructure and creating increased internet access in communities, Indigenous developers would finally have the space to experiment, build new platforms, and educate the next generation of developers within their local communities. As Lewis continues, “By engaging in the conversation that is shaping new media systems and structures, Native people can claim an agency in how that shaping comes forward” (63). Through AbTeC, Lewis is defining a path for achieving his vision:

1. The creation of original artwork that addresses the future of Native people on the North American continent;
2. Educating Aboriginal youth in new media production, emphasizing the integration of Aboriginal stories and storytelling techniques into the process; and
3. Developing a trajectory whereby young Aboriginal people can move from new media consumption to media production to technology development, and bring that production and development activity back to the reserve. (60)

Indigenous futurisms aim to establish Indigenous engagement with new media technologies through art and storytelling in order to centralize Indigenous worldviews in the structures and systems of ICT (72). In Nunavut, the implementation of robust, equitable internet connections will make it easier for Inuit to engage in the futurisms movement, integrating IQ into new media platforms. Inuit can create new first-mile technologies for community life that bring the production of those technologies to Nunavut. In so doing, Inuit can reach new markets and obtain positions of power in a range of areas including the technology sector, corporations, government, and academic institutions that will inspire younger generations and see Inuit culture grow and influence global consciousness.

## **Inuit Futurisms**



The graphic artist, writer, and activist Alootook Ipellie (1951–2007)<sup>7</sup> anticipated this vision of the IF movement in Nunavut. Born on the land in a small hunting camp outside Iqaluit, his work comments on the impact of colonialism on Inuit society. He imagined a future of Inuit cultural resistance and resurgence. Ipellie focused on the resiliency of Inuit culture and survival in the post-colonial Arctic (Alootook Ipellie). He wrote:

Today Inuit communities enjoy all the modern conveniences and the latest in technology. Some new technologies provide innovative ways of preserving and sharing Inuit traditions. . . . Inuit have developed websites in Inuktitut and in other languages to share our Inuit culture. . . . Today, Inuit show the same spirit of innovation in the ways in which we work to preserve our traditional culture while living a modern lifestyle. . . . And as the future brings even more changes, my people will continue to innovate and adapt to move ahead with the times while preserving and strengthening the traditions of our past. (*The Inuit Thought of It* 28-29)

Ipellie argued that Inuit IQ can take many contemporary forms and can be expressed in both physical and new digital media. As Igloliorte explains,

[a]lthough Inuit still grapple with the histories and ongoing legacies of nearly a century of colonialism in the North, and current serious issues regarding the environment, food security, and quality of life in the Arctic, there has been a shift toward Inuit independence and a return to a self-determined existence brought about by the practice of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, paralleled by a growing critique of past representations and an assertion of Inuit self-representation. . . . As Inuit continue to practice *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* and ensure its continuation and relevance in daily life, our artistic practices thrive. (*Curating Inuit*

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<sup>7</sup> There are conflicting published birth years for Ipellie. Several sources cite 1951, but his entry on the Artist Database published by the Inuit Art Foundation lists 1957.

In his drawing *The Idiot Box is Here* (1975), Ipellie visualizes a scene with an Inuk man watching television outdoors with a community of igloos behind him, each with antennas sticking out from the tops of the structures. The term “idiot box,” which refers to the television, is employed in this image as a weapon of cultural destruction, a vehicle of propaganda, and a dumbing down of society. In this context, people who watch the “idiot box” are likely to believe everything they see: mass media is likened to an acculturative virus with widespread influence on community life (Barney, Maskegon-Iskwew).

**Material has been removed due to  
copyright restrictions.**

Image title: *The Idiot Box is Here*

Image description: Ink on paper work by Alootook Ipellie depicting an Inuk man watching television outdoors with a community of igloos behind him, each with antennas sticking out from the tops of the structures.

View original image here:  
<http://stlawu.edu/the-idiot-box-here>

Figure 2.1. Ipellie, Alootook. *The Idiot Box is Here*. 1975. Ink on paper. 10 9/16 x 8 1/4 in. Richard F. Brush Gallery, St. Lawrence University. Canton, New York.

Throughout his career, Ipellie was a constant critic of colonialism. In *The Death of Nomadic Life, the Creeping Emergence of Civilization* (2003) he comments on the duality of northern life and the emergence of settler culture. On the outside of a centred frame, a traditional hunting scene shows a central figure holding a bloodied hunting knife on the left and a harpoon on the right. In the distance behind him is an igloo and a dogsled team. In the foreground, the Inuk figure is framed by a mirror universe. On the outside of the scaffolding he appears in a traditional fur coat, but on the inside he wears imagery of Western cultural dominance. The reflection shows a despondent man with amphibian eyes wearing a colonial smoking jacket and bowtie. His left jacket pocket holds Elvis Presley concert tickets and the right, bloodied money. This image summarizes the impacts of acculturation on Inuit collective consciousness.

**Material has been removed due to copyright restrictions.**

Image title: *The Death of Nomadic Life, the Creeping Emergence of Civilization*

Image description: Ink on illustration board work by Alootook Ipellie depicting a traditional hunting scene with a central figure holding a bloodied hunting knife on the left and a harpoon on the right. In the distance behind him is an igloo and a dogsled team. In the foreground, the Inuk figure is framed by a mirror universe. On the outside of the scaffolding he appears in a traditional fur coat, but on the inside he wears imagery of Western cultural dominance. The reflection shows a despondent man with amphibian eyes wearing a colonial smoking jacket and bowtie. His left jacket pocket holds Elvis Presley concert tickets and the right, bloodied money.

View original image here: <https://canadianart.ca/ipellie>

Figure 2.2. Ipellie, Alootook. *The Death of Nomadic Life, the Creeping Emergence of Civilization*. 2007. Ink on illustration board.

Ipellie, however, did not concede to colonialism but encouraged his community to keep fighting and believing in a future based on IQ. In his article “The Colonization of the Arctic,” Ipellie explains:

Every one of us now knows that the settlers were waging a losing battle from the start. The regrettable thing is, they continue to fight. Because of this, the Inuit cannot afford to abandon their struggle for recognition of their right to control their future. This active role is something new for the Inuit. . . . However, this change is inevitable because it is the only way they can preserve what’s left of their traditional culture and language. The present generation of Inuit possess

hearts and minds toughened by raw experience with the hardships of the past as well as with the unpredictable turns and tides of living in the modern world. . . . Herein lies their resolve. Despite having experienced incalculable injustices to their traditional culture and language, the Inuit will wake tomorrow with their chests thrust forward and their heads held high. They will end the nightmares of the past and once again dream some wonderful dreams for the future. (Ipellie 56–57)

Ipellie envisioned Inuit cultural survival by imagining a future where Inuit resistance met colonialism through IQ. He wrote in his article “Nunatsiaqmiut: People of the Good Land, Part Two”, “The land, animals. and the Inuit are inseparable; their relationship seems to have been made in heaven. This is a reality that has never been properly understood by the domi-nant society. Inuit have much to teach people in other lands about our culture and heritage. It is important for us that we be given the power and authority to preserve our domain for future generations” (28). The more recent Inuit futurisms movement is a response to the colonial narrative on Indigenous cultural survival and an option for stronger Inuit engagement in rewriting the past, sharing stories and IQ, and taking hold of how the communities envision their future globally. As Igloliorte writes in her article “Curating Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit: Inuit Knowledge in the Qallunaat Art Museum”,

Although there exists a vast literature on Inuit art in Canada—including hundreds of exhibition catalogues and scholarly texts, edited volumes, journal articles, and publications in the popular media—very little of it has been produced by Inuit. Despite the critical and commercial success of Inuit art, which has flourished since the beginning of the modern Inuit art movement in the mid-twentieth century into an internationally recognized art form and multimillion-dollar industry, the research, study, and dissemination of Inuit art has largely been the work of *Qallunaat* (non-Inuit) scholars, curators, critics, and museum staff. . . . There is yet to be a single full-time Inuit museum employee at any of our major

national or provincial institutions, and few have ever been employed in the many Inuit and Indigenous private art galleries or in auction houses, as freelance authors, research assistants, critics, or film or exhibition reviewers. (101)

Technological disenfranchisement of Inuit exponentially exacerbates the imbalance Iglooliorte acknowledges in Inuit art historiography and, by extension, self-representation and control over the Inuit art market constituting an Inuit cultural voice.

Through IF, Inuit artists are reimagining their survivance across Inuit Nunangat through experimentation with ICT and new media. While there are exciting changes in the art world for Inuit artists, there remains a lack of technical innovation in the Nunavut visual arts sector as a result of the conservatism of the art market and poor and unreliable ICT silencing Inuit living in remote communities. For example, in October 2018 there were 383 artists listed in the Inuit Art Foundation's Artists Database, which features Inuit artists from across Canada. Of the artists in the database, 320 or 83.5% of the artists are from Nunavut. Of those artists, there are none working in the fields of new media, virtual reality (VR), instillation, or animation<sup>8</sup> (Inuit Artist Database, October 9, 2018). Unfortunately, the majority of artists from Nunavut who work with new media have relocated to southern urban centres due to poor connectivity and lack of access to emerging technologies in the north. Artists such as Couzyn van Heuvelen and Ruben

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<sup>8</sup> Two artists are mistakenly listed under animation: sculptor Timoon Alariaq and printmaker Pudloo Samayualie. At the time this research was conducted, neither had worked in digital animation. The third artist listed is Dayle Kubluitok, an artist from Kangiqliniq (Rankin Inlet) who studies in Toronto, Ontario and lives in Iqaluit, Nunavut. Her crafts are illustration, photography, and graphic arts.

Anton Komangapik find ways to merge important aspects of Inuit culture such as hunting and carving with new technologies, playing with the role of tradition in new creation methods in the contemporary landscape. Nyla Innuksuk and Jesse Tungilik experiment with new technologies to make important comments on contemporary Inuit and Indigenous life. The artist collective Mittimatalik Arnait Miqusuqtuit collaborates to document and disseminate traditional skills and knowledge for the health, wellbeing, and longevity of Inuit culture. Each of these artists/collectives is envisioning Inuit futurisms for Inuit across Canada.

### **Couzyn van Heuvelen**

Inuk new media, sculptor, and installation artist Couzyn van Heuvelen (b. 1987) explores Inuit culture and identity by melding new and traditional Inuit technologies through personal narratives (Couzyn.ca, Sutherland 87). Originally from Iqaluit, he is currently located in Bowmanville, Ontario, although he considers his practice to be northern-based (Hunter). Inspired by his father who worked in welding, van Heuvelen's work focuses on material exploration as he attempts to find innovative and unique methods of creation such as mixing three-dimensional (3D) printing with sculptural design techniques and playing with the relationships between traditional objects and their cultural meanings.

An example of this exploration of material and concept is seen in van Heuvelen's 2016 work *Avataq*. An *avataq* is a buoy used in whale hunting that is made from a

whole sealskin. The sealskin is sewn and sealed at the top with either a wood or ivory plug, then inflated and sealed at the other end with the same plugging method. The *avataq* is affixed to the end of a harpoon with a thin sealskin line or rope. In van Heuvelen's *Avataq*, he explores hybrid objects through screen-printing seal skin patterns on silver mylar balloons. In this way, when the balloons are filled with helium, the mylar floats and can be seen at a distance, similar to an *avataq* in the water. This work engages with cultural relationships through cross-cultural objects and is about enticing spectators to make "good associations" with celebrating Inuit culture and traditions through the inviting and accessible movement of the balloons (Hunter, Couzyn.ca).





Figure 2.3. van Heuvelen, Couzyn. *Avataq*. 2016. Screen printed mylar, ribbon, aluminum, helium. 36 x 30 x 16 in. Fazakas Gallery. Vancouver, British Columbia.

Other works by van Heuvelen utilize the same concept with varying technological approaches. Utilizing the same methods as northern artists producing sculpture, he seeks organic materials from the land such as stones, walrus husks, and polar bear

skulls. Instead of carving these materials directly, van Heuvelen takes digital photographs of the objects in their natural environment. He then travels south and brings the images into his studio where he renders 3D objects using modelling software and then casts the figures in bronze and silver (Gallpen 17). This method is seen in his *Fishing Weights* (2015) series.



Figure 2.4. Left: van Heuvelen, Couzyn. *Walrus Lure*, 2015. Silver, fish hook, thread, and brass. 6 x 1.5 x 48 in. Right: *Baleen Lure*, 2015. Baleen, fish hook, thread, and brass. 6 x 1.25 x 48 in. Fazakas Gallery. Vancouver, British Columbia.

These works play on traditions, utility, construction, and the importance of fishing for coastal Inuit communities. For over 1,000 years Inuit hunters have been harvesting

fish using one of the most common methods referred to as “cast and snag”. In this method, hooks, lures, and weights are attached to a long line that is cast into the water. Weights are typically made from any available small, heavy object such as stones. Below the weight but above the hook sits a lure. Inuit hunters and craftspeople create highly realistic lures carved out of shell, antler, or bone that look like small organic figures to entice fish to bite the hook (Nunavut Fishing Tradition). In his work *Walrus Lure* (from the *Fishing Weight* series), van Heuvelen created a small 3D-printed lure in the form of a walrus head and cast it in heavy silver. In *Baleen Lure* from the same series, he carved the baleen<sup>9</sup> into a large, rounded teardrop form and then etched an abstract pattern onto the whale bone with a laser cutter. These lures are displayed hung from the ceiling of the gallery. Not only has van Heuvelen used a new technology to create these works, but by positioning them above the spectators’ view as a fish would see them, he calls into question who is the hunter and what is being hunted (Gallpen 17, Thomson). These works suggest a narrative where the colonial systems of power are reversed.

van Heuvelen is an innovator of material and form who challenges the idea that Inuit art can only be carving or prints. As art critic Erin Sutherland states, “By repurposing raw materials of silver and bronze to reference traditional materials that are increasingly difficult to access, the artist raises questions of material value, hybridity and connection to kin through making” (Sutherland 81). His work engages with the IF

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<sup>9</sup> The tough material used to filter seawater found under the upper jaw of whales without teeth.

movement by reimagining tradition through technology. In so doing he broadens the scope of Inuit art in terms of what is considered “art” and how works can be constructed and displayed.<sup>10</sup>

## **Nyla Innuksuk**

Nyla Innuksuk (b. 1986) is an Inuk filmmaker and leader in the field of 360-degree and VR filmmaking. Originally from Igloolik, she is currently located in Toronto, where she runs Mixtape VR (<https://mixtapevr.com>), a fully Indigenous-owned, female-run media company. Her focus is the development of Inuit content, talent, and leadership. As Innuksuk states, “At the core of who I am, I’m an Inuk. I’m proud of where I come from and I am trying to do the most with what I have been given. And for me that is telling stories” (Momin). Innuksuk’s films are primarily produced in Inuktitut. When she films in Nunavut, she ensures that all aspects of her work including production, development, and distribution are created alongside artists who were born or raised in the territory. Innuksuk explores her creative voice through VR, bridging arts and technology to create immersive stories that connect people across cultures and broaden their perspectives about the world (Momin).

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<sup>10</sup> Couzyn van Heuvelen was long-listed for the 2018 Sobey Art Award, the largest prize (valued at \$100,000) for young Canadian artists. Since 2002 only one Inuk, Annie Pootoogook, has won the prize. Although van Heuvelen ultimately did not receive the Sobey, his nomination signifies the importance and influence of his work in Canada.

In 2018, Innuksuk completed the inaugural imagineNATIVE Indigenous VR/augmented reality (AR) residency where she worked with virtual mapping to explore how new technologies can transform space in a virtual gallery (ImagineNATIVE). In addition to this work, she has collaborated with contemporary Inuit and Indigenous artists and musicians such as Tanya Tagaq, The Jerry Cans, and A Tribe Called Red on immersive VR projects. Innuksuk is also one of the architects that collaborated on the 2017 VR project 2167 co-presented by Concordia's AbTeC Indigenous Futures initiative, which features Indigenous artists including Danis Goulet, Scott Benesiinaabandan, Postcommodity, and Kent Monkman (McNamara). This project incorporates a series of VR installations imagining life 150 years in the future to reveal a future imaginary where Indigenous cultures are centralized and celebrated. In this 2167 experience, users are immersed in movement as they sit in a swivel chair integrated with the VR headset. The user travels into the future to experience a landscape where Indigenous peoples play the protagonists in the transformation of Canadian society. The intent of this project is to create a space where conversations about IF can happen in tangible, constructive, and inclusive ways (TIFF).

Themes of IF can be seen in Innuksuk's work *Indian City Featuring Black Bear 360*, which showcases music by A Tribe Called Red, a group that fuses First Nations chanting, music, and drumming with elements of electronic, pop, and dubstep.



Figure 2.5. Innuksuk, Nyla, Mixtape VR Inc. *Indian City Featuring Black Bear 360, A Tribe Called Red*. 2016. Image used with the permission of the artist. The opinions expressed in this dissertation are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the artists, Mixtape VR Inc., or any affiliate organization.

Filmed in Toronto, the video is a full, high-angle, set master shot of Fort York from the perspective of Garrison Common. The location is a deliberate choice, because it is a national historic site considered to be the birthplace of modern-day Toronto, although its Indigenous history reaches back over 5,000 years (Benn, Beattie). Innuksuk positions Fort York as the epicentre of the urban landscape as First Nations breakdancers and powwow artists flow in and out of the scene. Visually, the video mixes colonial architecture with the resilient vibrancy of First Nations culture. As the dance celebration continues in the foreground of the video, in the background superimposed neon animation lights up the cityscape as large 8-bit images of powwow artists dance atop buildings. This is another example of a digitally conceived

alterNative reality celebrating the resurgence of Indigenous power and a possible future within the IF movement.

### **Mittimatalik Arnait Miqusuqtuit**

February 2015 saw the launch of the Mittimatalik Arnait Miqusuqtuit, a women's sewing collective based in Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet). The mission of this non-profit organization is "to document skin processing and sewing skills and to acquire photographs and footage of skills taught by the experts that apprentice seamstresses can access online" (Mittimatalik Facebook). In 2016 the collective began the *Sealskin Sewing Channel* on the Vimeo platform,<sup>11</sup> a video-sharing platform that allows for unlimited bandwidth in the online player, hi-resolution support, and no advertisements. (Vimeo). These features allow users a seamless experience while conserving bandwidth. Mittimatalik Arnait Miqusuqtuit's engagement with technology is twofold in this project due to the living technology inherently embedded in IQ and the production

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<sup>11</sup> Although Vimeo is a reliable, low-cost service in southern Canada and Europe, the platform does not have the low bandwidth streaming options that are required in Nunavut communities. In the community where Mittimatalik Arnait Miqusuqtuit create their works, the internet service caps are high so that community members have to budget their internet for the month, choosing between cultural streaming and other essential services such as downloading Portable Document Format (PDF) documents and accessing government and bill-paying websites. According to Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet), the internet service provider Qiniq, which is the most common and affordable service in the area, offers wireless connections at 3 mbps downloading speeds with a 35G usage cap for \$180 per month. This speed creates a pixelated, slow user experience when accessing streaming sites like Vimeo.



of digital content. According to Nancy Wachowich of the University of Aberdeen, a collaborator on the project, “... Technology cannot be so narrowly defined such as only to encompass instruments themselves (organic or mechanical), but must enroll the social processes that are part of material practice. Such an expanded understanding requires that analytical distinctions be made between those terms derived from the received concept of technology. Thus, technique (the skills of human subjects) must be differentiated from technology — a corpus of generalized, objective knowledge for practical application — and from tools — an object that extends the capacity of an agent to operate within a given environment” (14). In this way, the collective engages with the Inuit futurisms movement through the technology embedded in IQ, providing the next generation with the skills necessary to carry Inuit culture forward.





Figure 2.6. Sangoya, Ruth, *Mittimatalik Arnait Miqusuqtuit Collective. Ruth Master Class 4.* 2016.

Sheila Katsak and Leah Kippomee started the collective in collaboration with Wachowich with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) partnership grant titled Mobilizing Inuit Cultural Heritage at York University (Wachowich, iNuit Blanche, Vimeo). Leah Kippomee retired from MAMC in summer 2015. The collective has been operating with the collaboration of Katsak and Wachowich and a rotating membership of over 24 people including over seamstresses, videographers and a number of youth production assistants (University of Aberdeen). The footage, now available online, has grown to 76 classes and three long films (March 2019).

The first phase of the project was recording visual documentation and was followed by a longer post-production phase where editing was completed in collaboration with community members. Subsequent phases saw more Elders and seamstresses involved in the filming with smaller, more personalized filming techniques. The group is mindful of the low connectivity of the area and circumvents this issue by distributing offline copies of the works within the community. As Wachowich states, “For community members without easy access to the internet, portable [usb flash drives] circulating in the settlement enable materials to be shared freely among family and friends locally. Photobooks have also been printed for elder seamstresses without home computers” (University of Aberdeen). As of March 2019 the Vimeo site had 24 followers, but the Facebook page has a larger reach with 353 followers and 348 likes (Mittimatalik). The

online community engagement demonstrates how important these courses are to Nunavummiut. Mittimatalik Arnait Miqsuqtuit is providing an essential service to its community and engaging with Inuit futurisms by utilizing technology to educate the community and inspire users to learn and build from IQ.

### **Ruben Anton Komangapik**

Ruben Anton Komangapik (b. 1976) is a multimedia sculptor from Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet) whose work bridges IQ, art, and technology. He deals directly with ICT and digital communication and connectivity by incorporating quick response (QR) codes into his sculptures. A QR code is a type of barcode that can be scanned by smartphones or tablets and takes the user to a specific website. Komangapik saw an opportunity to engage his audience through this technology. As he stated in an interview,

I thought it would be an interesting way to get the art out there and let people connect with it. [For] the QR project [the user] doesn't need a [URL], you can also take a picture of the piece and get the information. The idea of the code was to educate people about the actual piece. A lot of the time when people see the work for the first time, they don't know how to interpret it. They try to interpret it in their own way. The QR code gives people a link to information so they know how it was made and what it is about. I have never checked how many people have looked on the site but three pieces are in the National Gallery now so I know it is working. (Komangapik)

In his work *Nanuruqtuq (with QR code)* (2014), Komangapik builds on themes from Inuit culture. *Angkkuuniq* (a form of shamanism, according to Komangapik) has played a significant role in Inuit cosmology, particularly from the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the widespread adoption of Christianity within Inuit communities. Drum dancing is central to the *angakkuq*'s (shaman's) function, because it is used to establish spiritual connections. The *angakkuq* has many roles in Inuit society including enacting laws, settling disagreements, healing the sick, and performing in celebrations (Laugrand and Oosten xxvii–xix, 307). Shamans are supported by animal spirits as sentient beings with varying strengths and abilities. As Komangapik describes in the *Nanuruqtuq* YouTube linked description, “[*Nanuruqtuq*] represents a shaman transforming into a polar bear. In the animal kingdom the polar bear was the strongest. In the old days the shamans used to do duels to win arguments, to do law or have festivities they used to drum dance and some of them were able to transform into polar bears” (*Nanuruqtuq*). The sculpture itself is a smooth, balanced piece portraying the *angakkuq* in mid-dance and mid-transformation. The ice-blue marble is interlaced with flecks of metal. In the centre of the drum sits a QR code, and at its centre are Komangapik's initials in Inuktitut syllabics. The corresponding YouTube page has 185 views. In addition to being informative, the site allows audiences to build personal connections with the artist and the work.



Figure 2.7. Komangapik, Ruben Anton. *Nanuruqtuq (with QR code)*. 2014. Amazonia Nunavut gold, sterling silver, marble. 267 x 267 x 15 cm. Galerie d'art Vincent, photo courtesy of Estelle Marcoux. Ottawa, Ontario.

Similarly, Komangapik's piece *Nattiqmut Qajusijugut* (2014) embeds a QR code in the heart of Inuit culture and expression. *Nattiqmut Qajusijugut* is a wall hanging made from dried harp seal skin. The skin is punctured with a harpoon at the top of the work where its fore flippers would meet and hung on the gallery wall. Below the harpoon is a large QR code formed from fur occupying the majority of the bottom of the work.



Figure 2.8. Komangapik, Ruben Anton. *Nattiqmut Qajusijugut*. 2014. Harp seal skin, antique steel, bronze sterling silver, nylon rope, wax nylon. 15 cm. National Gallery of Canada, photo courtesy of Estelle Marcoux. Ottawa, Ontario.

The corresponding social media link has 746 views, and the video features Komangapik telling a story of his personal connection to the seal as sustenance. He says this piece was inspired by a family tale from when hunting was difficult and there was too much snow. He says,

It's a story my uncle told and it is about the family. It happened a long time ago in the Pond Inlet area. . . . That year there was so much snow that they were not catching any seals and they had a hard time feeding the families. They had to go up into the lake and they were starting to get really cold and the sun was starting to get really short. This man asked my Grandpa if he could borrow some of his dogs so he could go

ask for help from the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] people in Pond Inlet ... so he agreed for him to take the dogs. . . . The ice had lots of snow that year and on the way [the man] bumped into a polar bear. And he caught it. . . . But this man did not want to go back for the families. He continued to Pond Inlet. (Nattiqmut Qajusijugut)

The man left the families on the land to die, keeping the meat for himself. After days of near-starvation, Komangapik's grandfather was able to catch a seal, which sustained the family until they reached the RCMP. Komangapik concludes, "The seal is the reason why I'm here and it's really important that we hunt this creature because we love it" (Nattiqmut Qajusijugut). Again, this link helps spectators engage with the work through technology, storytelling, and visual art.

Komangapik became a professional artist while the internet was developing in the north. He tempers his enthusiasm for the QR project with caution about the dangers of posting art online. "I used to be happy to put art online for free when the internet first came to the North." but, "[t]hen people started copying my work. So I stopped putting it online and would send my work to galleries so they could advertise online. I had music up but then people were taking it. It is not good because the artists don't get paid" (Komangapik). Slow internet speeds compound copyright issues because artists do not have the bandwidth to track where their images are being used or the resources to fight infringements. New technologies, such as the QR project, allow artists to follow their work more closely.

Although artists do need to be careful of how they present work online, Komangapik says that the internet is ultimately a good thing. He states, “Low-cost, high speed internet would help a lot for artists working in media and research. Documentaries are hard to make because the files are so large and watching them is hard because they are not easy to share and people can’t watch it” (Komangapik). Komangapik also notes that working and emerging artists need the internet to get a feel for the art market: “Artists need everything. There is so much knowledge up there that is not being transmitted in a fast way like in the South. I think the hardest part for new artists is that if someone wants to sell a piece they need to send big images and beautiful pictures. These files are very heavy so it’s a big problem” (Komangapik). Despite the setbacks online, Komangapik has not stopped creating works that engage with the Inuit futurisms movement. He crafts a narrative of possibilities through the melding of sculpture and emerging technologies that causes viewers to speculate about the relationship between the tangible and the digital. He gives to the viewer a call to action that takes the conceptual “otherness” out of the stationary perspective of sculpture and makes it an interactive experience.

## **Jesse Tungilik**

Jesse Tungilik (b.1984) is a multimedia artist based in Pangnirtung. His main artistic practice is focused on ceramics and jewellery making, although he frequently experiments in mixed media to make pointed comments on life in Nunavut, a skill passed down from his grandfather. Tungilik says in an interview, “As an artist I decided



that I wanted to challenge myself and try things that I hadn't seen other Inuit artists do. I had grown up idolizing my grandfather, Marc Tungilik, who spent his life as a carver. His art mirrored his life and experiences depicting traditional themes and subjects. My life and experiences were quite a bit different than his, and I wanted my art to reflect that" (Tungilik). Experimentation and cultural continuity are demonstrated in his 2013 work *Nunavice Flag*.



Figure 2.9. Tungilik, Jesse. *Nunavice Flag*. 2013. Mixed media on plywood. 1.2 × 1.8 m.

For this piece, Tungilik recreated the flag of Nunavut out of found or used objects such as beer labels, cigarette packages, and bingo cards, which he roughly affixed to a plywood board. *Nunavice Flag* relies on the Inuksuk as the central figure, a symbol in Inuit culture used for navigation and land marking. In this piece, the figure grounds Inuit culture as the underlying element. In juxtaposition with Ipellie's *The Death of Nomadic Life, the Creeping Emergence of Civilization*, Tungilik places a symbol of Inuit culture at



the heart of the image both figuratively and spatially, whereas Ipellie centralizes colonialism. Similarly, this piece comments on the impacts of Euro-Canadian imports into the north and the continued influence of colonialism on Nunavut communities (Procida Jesse *Tungilik*). The use of discarded objects as a method of survivance, as supported by Vizenor, is a way to take an active stance of presence over the impacts of colonization and the narratives of cultural absence. A symbol of navigation on the land is reimagined as a symbol of guidance through addictions introduced to communities by colonization.

Tungilik extends his commentary on the ravages of addiction in his community as he ventures into new media through his project, *Bottled*. In summer 2018, Tungilik was the recipient of the Banff Artist in Residence (BAiR) award. He travelled to the Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity for a five-week self-directed intensive program that offers artists the chance to experiment with cutting-edge materials and techniques (Banff, Huard). *Bottled* is a 3D-printed Inuk figure cast in bronze and suspended inside a glass bottle in clear polyester resin. Concerning this project, Tungilik states, “I’m doing a conceptual sculpture series, exploring the cultural and intergenerational impacts of addiction and alcoholism” (Huard). In this piece the figure appears to be sinking, struggling for a release from the permanent swirls of air frozen in place by resin.



Figure 2.10. Tungilik, Jesse. *Bottled*. 2018. Bronze cast, 3D print, polyester resin inside a glass bottle.

For creative inspiration, Tungilik relies on the resources that broadband offers. He states, “The internet has played an absolutely vital role in my artistic practice and development. I use it for research and inspiration, I use it to find technical advice when I’m not sure how to do something, and I use it to market myself and my work. Almost

all of my sales as a Jewelry artist were made online, and I developed a small but loyal clientele from my online marketing and sales. It's also very useful to see online what other artists are doing and what is popular so you can predict trends and find niches that would have been more difficult to find without access to the internet" (Tungilik).

As a working artist and former employee of the cultural industries division in the Government of Nunavut, Tungilik has a unique perspective on both the creation and business side of the Nunavut arts and crafts sector. He states,

I saw it as a great opportunity to utilize my skills and experience to help other artists in Nunavut. It also gives me a better perspective on the cultural industries sector as a whole which is very useful because there is a lot of inter-connectivity between the different disciplines that could be better capitalized on. . . . It is my hope that my experience as a professional artist will help me to make it easier for artists in Nunavut to access the training and resources needed to become successful and prosperous. The lack of access to high-speed internet acts as a barrier to Inuit artists being exposed to the many different styles and artistic disciplines out there, as well as valuable online training, which is usually multimedia-intensive. I absolutely believe that having strong, equitable access to online resources would be good for the Nunavut Arts and Crafts sector. Right now it seems like we in Nunavut are looking at the cyber world through a keyhole, and it is very limiting. (Tungilik)

As Tungilik argues, establishing strong networks offers new avenues for artists to connect to the global marketplace and empowers them in gaining sovereignty and control of history, creation, and market value. Equitable and affordable internet access would also help emerging artists follow in Tungilik's footsteps, engage with Inuit futurisms, and bring new media arts production into their communities.

## Conclusion

Artists such as van Heuvelen, Innuksuk, the sewers of Mittimatalik Arnait Miqsuqtuit, Komangapik, and Tungilik are not only imagining new Inuit futures and alterNative realities, but are paving the way for the next generation of artists to innovate within the Inuit art market. The IF movement expands on what is possible for future artists to achieve, carries forward the principals of IQ, and works towards Ipellie's vision of Inuit power through culturally strong communities. However, this vision for Nunavut will not become a reality until affordable, accessible network connections are implemented through strong ICT infrastructure and Inuit-generated content is promoted through those connections. As demonstrated by Ipellie, mass media can be an acculturative device if it is not promoting Inuit culture. In the next chapter, I review the literature surrounding the 20-year debate over the relationship between ICT, mass media, and Indigenous community health. The rural and remote locations of Inuit communities with poor ICT service, similar to other Indigenous groups, often exclude Indigenous voices from global dialogue and decision making due to lack of connectivity. The literature on the relationship between ICT, broadband, and Indigenous cultural health ranges from a theoretical position of predicting the negative influence of consumerism and mass media on First Peoples' cultures to arguing for the absolute necessity of high-speed networks in Indigenous societies.

### CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, academics have been debating the relevance and impact of broadband on Indigenous cultures. In his book *Prometheus Wired* (2000), Darin Barney marvels at the capacity and innovation of network technology but cautions that it is a culturally neutralizing advancement. He argues that through wired networks capitalism erases the need for distinction and diversity, reducing choice to whatever is popular or fashionable in the moment. He states that technology, at its core, is destructive to Indigenous traditions. As Barney argues, “a massive commitment to build network infrastructure is not a choice that asserts political sovereignty; it is a confession of its impossibility” (255). The dilemma, he concludes, is that in order to retain independence, communities must embrace technological change, but in doing so, they risk losing that independence.

For Barney, the pursuit of the adoption of technology negates the pursuit of sovereignty. In the case of the Arctic, for thousands of years Inuit lived on the land and ventured across the sea, hunting. They thrived for a millennia in the Arctic environment, isolated but strong and free. Colonization in the last century brought the attempted erasure of Inuit culture, erosion of land, forced relocation, new diseases, and the trauma of residential schools. Rapid social change introduced new challenges for communities such as addiction, poverty, and a suicide crisis (Schreiber). According to Barney, by pursuing a colonialist tool such as the internet, Inuit risk more outside culture coming into their communities, furthering Western ideals and identities.

Barney's caution is echoed in Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew's article "Drumbeats to Drumbytes: Globalizing Networked Aboriginal Art" through which the author likens mass media to "cultural nerve gas" destroying the soul of a people and leaving an empty shell to wander day to day. Maskegon-Iskwew states that mass media is harmful unless broadcast in community languages to help establish Indigenous cultural and linguistic norms. He continues that the social world created by ICT overshadows native cultures in Indigenous communities. Maskegon-Iskwew writes, "The social world created by the entertainment media has become the dominant reference point, and our social norms are both created and reinforced in the context of this medium" (190). Maskegon-Iskwew ultimately argues that Indigenous social norms must be created and reinforced in the context of the Indigenous, local medium in order to be beneficial to communities.

### **Embedding Culture Online: Meeting Community Needs**

In contrast, to Barney and Maskegon-Iskwew, in 2003 Neil Christensen published a study entitled "Inuit in Cyberspace: Embedding Offline Identities Online" based on four years of field work and an analysis of Inuit-produced websites. Christensen states that Inuit web creators tend to embed their culture online rather than deconstruct their identities. Thus, instead of adopting southern Canadian cultural norms, early studies of Inuit use of digital technology indicate that communities use the internet to strengthen Inuit culture, share stories online, connect with family members, and innovate IQ through technology. As emphasised by Anishinaabe-nehiyaw writer, curator,

community organizer, and researcher Lindsay Nixon, in the IF movement, “Indigenous peoples are using our own technological traditions—our worldviews, our languages, our stories, and our kinship—as guiding principles in imagining possible futures for ourselves and our communities” (Nixon). Indigenous futurisms focus on community possibilities through incorporating traditional knowledge with emerging technologies. Christensen touches on this concept when he provides examples of a continuum between online cyberspace and offline reality with constructed links to offline social networks, culture, and physical landscape. In his analysis, he notes that Inuit culture has always been reflective of a continuously changing process through which dynamic relationships to time, space, and significance of meaning are made on a unique, personalized basis. He concludes that the use of new technology by Inuit is not a corruption of culture, but a part of the continuous (re)shaping and integration of old and new elements in the lives of Inuit.

Furthermore, he finds that Inuit web creators and users contextualize their physical and online environment within a global context rather than using it to isolate themselves from their reality:

The Arctic way of constructing web pages breaks in on the transcendent myth of cyberspace, a myth where such boundary assertion is supposedly relegated to a secondary role because of the lack of physical matter in cyberspace. . . . While the lack of matter is certainly true in the strictest interpretation of its meaning, matter and local reality are nevertheless mirrored extensively . . . Local histories, cultures, identities, and environment are only some of the multiple choices for asserting dimensions wherein the local as well as cultural identity of Inuit is endowed. (68)

This contextualization of lived experiences can still be seen in Inuit-run sites and social media. Social media pages of Inuit organizations display a variety of local dimensions

with participants in and outside of Nunavut; the Facebook page of ITK has over 9,300 followers and posts content from Inuit communities every few hours (March 2019). Although social media sites have the most natural parallels to Christensen's work, more classic functioning websites offer a similar experience for Inuk users. For example, the online presence of Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada is a virtual space that advocates for the betterment of Inuit women, their families, and their communities. Tungasuvvingat's website is a multimedia hub for Inuit of all ages that focuses on helping urban Inuit navigate the challenges of living in the south while staying connected to their culture in the north. Qaggiavuut!, a not-for-profit organization committed to promoting, advocating for, and creating space for Nunavut performing artists through training and community outreach, has built an online space dedicated to strengthening performance arts in Nunavut (Qaggiavuut!: Our Vision). All three of these virtual sites mirror local realities, assert cultural identities, and engage with many aspects of Inuit culture through storytelling and outreach. Christensen criticizes authors who polarize ICT as either a destructive force or the tool that will save the culture as short-sighted. The innovations that can develop from the use of high-speed internet in Inuit communities not only have the potential to be unpredictable and surprising but are also required to develop community-based content, mobilize and preserve heritage and language, and compete in the global marketplace.



## **Indigenous Innovations in ICT: Reimagining and Redefining Web Space**

Indigenous innovations in ICT are explored in Candice Hopkins' article "Interventions in Digital Territories: Narrative in Native New Media" published in 2005. Hopkins, a First Nations curator, writes that within the first 10 years of web development in Indigenous communities, cyberspace has been occupied, transformed, appropriated, and reinvented by Native Peoples in ways similar to how Indigenous communities have always approached real space. She adds that web technology has become a medium for speaking and telling Indigenous stories, because nearly every website created by Native artists reflects real experiences. Hopkins writes, "Aligned with this communal nature, storytellers are continually embracing new materials and technologies such as video and digital media — materials that ensure that these practices maintain their relevance. I would suggest that this move does not threaten storytelling tradition, but is merely a continuation of what Aboriginal people have been doing from time immemorial: making things our own" (130). Hopkins argues that through the online narrative, Indigenous peoples can occupy and produce meaning through virtual relationships and interactive environments, where multiple images and windows occupy the same visual plane as text and other signifiers. In this manner, Indigenous storytellers are using the digital space not to shift the meaning of narrative but to shift how and by whom meaning is perceived, generated, and consumed. This shifting and creating of alterNative realities, as expressed by Dillon, is one of the foundations of the IF movement.

The continuity between lived experiences and virtual storytelling that Hopkins describes is demonstrated within Inuit-run web spaces; for example, Mittimatalik Arnait Miqustuit, the women's sewing collective discussed in the previous chapter, collaborated on a series of instructional videos to preserve traditional sewing techniques. These videos are hosted on the streaming service Vimeo. The recordings capture master and elder sewers who not only instruct through technique but through teaching shared experiences from their personal histories. Although ICT creates a link in the lived/virtual continuum, due to lack of internet, Inuit artists rely heavily on institutions located outside of the Arctic to facilitate web projects. In the case of Mittimatalik Arnait Miqustuit, the digital project was undertaken through funding by Mobilizing Inuit Cultural Heritage, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) partnership grant at York University, and technical aspects and web design were facilitated through researchers at the University of Aberdeen. Equitable access to ICT underlies Hopkins' assertions of "Native" people's ability to transform the online space. Currently, Inuit artists require significant support from institutions to be able to launch web-based projects due to the lack of internet connections, poor connectivity, and costly service packages.

Reliable and affordable internet connectivity in Nunavut's communities is a persistent issue. It is imperative for artists to continue creating their stories to preserve histories and lived experiences. It is important to ensure that Inuit artists have space other than Facebook to create cultural reference points and to modify and use as a digital springboard for conversation and cultural exchange. Digital storytelling is important as a form of resistance and a movement towards decolonization. As

professor, author, and activist Taiaiake Alfred writes in *Wasa'se: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*,

Not all of us have been conquered. There are still strong *Onkwehonwe* [meaning: real and original people] who persevere in their struggle for an authentic existence and who are capable of redefining, regenerating, and reimagining our collective existences. If we are willing to put our words into action and transform our rhetoric into practice, we too can achieve the fundamental goal of the indigenous warrior: to live life as an act of Indigeneity, to move across life's landscapes in an Indigenous way, as my people say, *Onkwehonweneha*. A warrior confronts colonialism with the truth in order to regenerate authenticity and recreate a life worth living and principles worth dying for. The struggle is to restore connections severed by the colonial machine. The victory is an integrated personality, a cohesive community and the restoration of respectful and harmonious relationships. (45)

By reimagining and redefining web space, Inuit artists keep heritage alive through sharing principles and creating a decolonizing path. As Steve Loft adds in *Coded Territories: Tracing Indigenous Pathways in New Media Art*, Indigenous media cosmology is

a model of media ecology based in the epistemologies, histories, traditions, communication systems, art, and culture of Aboriginal people of Turtle Island. 'Media cosmology' embraces an Indigenous view of media and its attendant process that incorporates language, culture, technology, land, spirituality, and histories encompassed in the teachings of the four directions. . . . Cosmological intellectual ecosystems exist as media, as message, and as a form of knowledge transferal. . . . Thus articulation of Aboriginal artistic production becomes a locus for contesting dominant modes of presentation and discourse. (18)

Indigenous-run spaces strengthen culture, reimagine futures, and work as a form of resistance by pushing back on the boundaries of colonialism. Inuit artists need broader access to digital spaces so they can continue innovating online.

## **Competing for Broadband: The Need for Stronger Ownership, Planning, and Policy**

More recently, writings about broadband and Indigeneity have shifted from discussing the theoretical positive or negative impacts of broadband on Native cultures to arguing for the implementation of stronger ownership, planning, and policy. Several texts explore the unique ways Indigenous communities utilize broadband in an attempt to establish the importance of ICT for Indigenous communities. In *Inuit in Cyberspace: The Struggle to IQ* (2009), Alexander et al. explore ways the internet is being leveraged as a resource to reclaim and assert Inuit identity via interactive, online multimedia representations and immersive online learning environments. These authors highlight the website of *The IQ Adventure* as a case study of how new media technologies can preserve and promote Inuit knowledge. The site leads users through a discovery of diverse resources, including a searchable database of elders. The authors state, “Inuit of Baffin Island were among the first Canadians to venture online, and like other Indigenous peoples around the world, there is clear evidence that Inuit, including elders, are keenly aware of the potential of new media technologies to promote and preserve Inuit language and cultures, and to assert shared social, political, and policy objectives” (241). They argue that new media technologies can push Inuit culture out into the global consciousness and pull at the national power centre that continues to ignore Northerners’ policy needs.

Alexander et al. conclude that ‘bandwidth-greedy’ sites such as *The IQ Adventure* are good in theory but cannot compete with Nunavut’s pressing telehealth and educational broadband requirements, making it impossible for resource-rich websites

to reach their target audience of Inuit communities. Alexander et al. state, “Satellite access makes data transfer more expensive than it is over a southern Canadian fibre optic line. . . . What is critical is to acknowledge that ‘remote’ communities such as Nunavut are increasingly dependent on the internet for the basic service that many southern Canadians take for granted” (Alexander et al. 241). This is as true today as it was in 2009. Cultural content is made available online; however, because of the high cost of streaming, Nunavummiut must make financial choices about which content they can afford within the data limits and restrictions of northern internet service plans. Alexander et al. also conclude that the failure of the Canadian government to establish high-speed broadband coast to coast constitutes the perpetuation of colonial control and power. By limiting connectivity in the Arctic and by privileging medical and legal networks, the government essentially controls what information can be shared across the network. This colonial control runs deeper in Inuit Nunangat than in any other location in the country. However, it is not only the installation of high-speed infrastructure that is essential for Arctic communities, but as Loft points out, there needs to be market competition and ready availability of Inuit-produced content that reflects social values through IQ to help keep communities healthy and connected to their culture.

## **Conclusion: Strengthening Cultural Ties**

Further publications relating to the use of internet and access in Indigenous communities highlight the ways that ICT is currently being used to strengthen cultural

ties. One example is found in the article “Social Media in Remote First Nations,” where Molyneaux et al. analyze the link between social media and community resilience in the Sioux Lookout region of northwestern Ontario. The authors demonstrate that social networking sites and websites with content populated by community members used to share information for the purpose of networking provide culturally strengthening opportunities to communicate within and outside of particular geographical and physical locations. Digital networking for First Peoples includes ties to people both inside and outside the community, intergenerational communication, the sharing of stories and family, and community connectedness. Molyneaux et al. state, “Social networking sites [thus] are potential tools that can support communities that have endured centuries of colonial aggression to reconstruct their identities” (284). Similar uses of social media networks occur in Nunavut.

Facebook is particularly popular in the territory and is used as a resource-sharing platform within and between communities that connects community members throughout Nunavut, to the south, and globally. Communication and exchange among and between Inuit and non-Inuit have therefore become streamlined. However, in spite of the growth of an online Inuit presence – largely on social media – residents of the Arctic are underserved in terms of internet access, especially when compared to Canadian urban centres. Infrastructure projects and social programming initiatives tend to be short-term, meeting only the minimum capacity required to participate in a high-bandwidth global network. In spite of restricted, costly, and slow internet service, Inuit are using social networks to generate an online space of digital identities on a global scale and promote inclusion, knowledge, dialogue, and exchange. A strong example of

this is the #sealfie movement, a platform for activists on social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube that promotes Inuit identity, as described in the following chapter. Decolonizing and Indigenizing ICT strengthens Inuit engagement in organizing collective action, controlling the dissemination of knowledge, and creating a unified vision of their culture. More community members engaging with new networks and technologies in Nunavut will inspire experimentation and outreach. Equitable access to ICT provides more opportunities for Inuit to become cultural leaders in a globalized marketplace.

## CHAPTER 4: THE #SEALFIE MOVEMENT

The majority of Arctic communities in Nunavut are isolated coastal communities that are fly-in only during the winter months. Historically, the relatively few people who could afford the demanding travel north, notably government officials – including the RCMP, which polices the Arctic – and natural resources/mining corporations seeking profit, have controlled the flow of information in the region. Although northern broadband infrastructure projects are slowly alleviating some of the most severe connectivity restrictions, when networks go down it can be days or weeks before connections are restored. Moreover, even Facebook only supports a limited level of content.

Frequent Arctic telecommunication blackouts resulting from satellite-only service leads to a one-sided, non-Inuit representation of life in the far north. According to ITK, “Inuit-specific data is inconsistently shared by researchers who may act unilaterally to publish and disseminate data without first seeking the consent of Inuit representational organizations or Inuit appointed institutions (*National Inuit Strategy on Research* 32). Due to this lack of connectivity, communities cannot properly monitor or control where Inuit knowledge is going. This is particularly challenging when it comes to Inuit participation in the constant global conversation on climate change, tourism, and economic sustainability, as well as the cultural expression and entrepreneurial development of digital platforms for Inuit visual art. However, social media is beginning to change this. As mobile technologies become more affordable, engineers at



companies such as Google and Facebook are optimizing web platforms through data compression technology for better use on low-bandwidth connections (Sobel, Gautam, Chaykowski, Hempel). Social networking provides a mechanism for Arctic residents to reframe the conversation about Inuit life and culture in increasingly powerful ways.

### **Unreliable Internet Leads to a One-Sided, Non-Inuit Representation of Arctic Life**

Social networking in remote and isolated areas creates ties for people both inside and outside the community, intergenerational communication, and connectedness (Hopkins, Molyneaux). Inuit of all ages are creating digital spaces to engage in storytelling, artistic expression, and advocacy. Popular social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter work well on slow connections and host rich digital content, connecting communities within Inuit Nunangat as well as nationally and globally. Social media is being leveraged as a platform for community advocacy and activism. A recent example of Arctic mobilization through social networking is the #sealfie movement. In 2011, comedian and celebrity environmentalist Ellen DeGeneres released a statement condemning seal hunting in Canada, proclaiming, "seal hunting is one of the most atrocious and inhumane acts against animals allowed by any government" (Ferrerias *Seal Hunt Supporter Takes Aim At Ellen*). Three years later, DeGeneres organized a star-studded selfie at the 2014 Oscar Awards that became one of the most shared images in social media history. The exposure of the Oscar selfie was so great that Samsung, the company who produced the cellphone that took the image, pledged to donate \$1 USD for every retweet it received to charities of DeGeneres' choice. The

photograph was shared 3.4 million times, and DeGeneres donated half of the money to the Humane Society of the United States, an organization committed to ending seal hunting in the Arctic (Hutchins). Sadly, DeGeneres' social media campaign solidified popular ignorance about seal hunting in the Canadian Arctic.

**Material has been removed due to copyright restrictions.**

Image caption: "If only Bradley's arm was longer. Best photo ever."

Image description: Self portrait photographed by Bradley Cooper featuring: (left-to-right): Jared Leto, Jennifer Lawrence, Channing Tatum, Meryl Streep, Ellen Degeneres, Julia Roberts, Kevin Spacey, Bradley Cooper, Brad Pitt, Lupita Nyong'O, Peter N'yongO and Angelina Jolie. Image captured at the 2014 Oscars Awards Ceremony at the Dolby Theatre, Los Angeles, California.

View original image here: <https://twitter.com/theellenshow/oscarsselfie>

Figure 4.1. DeGeneres, Ellen. @oscars Selfie @TheEllenShow. 3 Mar. 2014, <https://twitter.com/TheEllenShow>.

DeGeneres' outcry is a compelling example of how Inuit culture continues to be misrepresented in mainstream media. The seal hunt is a traditional and deeply meaningful means of survival in the north, where the majority of communities are

coastal. As stated on the *Sustainable Sealing in Traditional Economy in Nunavut* website, “Seals have always been central to Inuit culture, sustaining traditional sharing customs, conveying a special knowledge of the seal and its ecosystem, and keeping skills and values alive from generation to generation.” DeGeneres leveraged her fame to contribute over a million dollars to fund a campaign that directly attacks the Inuit way of life. Not only that, her network became a powerful machine for spreading misinformation about Inuit culture, leading to harmful digital assaults on communities and community members.

### **Community Activism via Social Media**

Playing upon the Oscar selfie, a “sealfie”, initiated by Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, is a self-portrait of people wearing or working with sealskin (CBC DOC POV). The movement is an awareness campaign that “supports and promotes the sustainable and humane seal harvest” (Nunavut Tunngavik Supports Selfie Movement). The #sealfie movement has become popular, receiving hundreds of individual posts, bringing communities together to create “giant sealfies”, and drawing celebrities and high-profile artists to participate in the movement (Ferrerias *Inuit Group Plans ‘Giant Sealfie’ To Protest Ellen*).



Figure 4.2. Arnaquq-Baril, Alethea. #Sealfie @TheEllenShow. 26 Mar. 2014, [https://twitter.com/Alethea\\_Aggiuq](https://twitter.com/Alethea_Aggiuq).

**Material has been removed due to copyright restrictions.**

Image caption: "India bans seal fur!"

Image description: Portrait of weddell seal pup in icy landscape.

View original image here: [https://www.facebook.com/killages\\_seal](https://www.facebook.com/killages_seal)

Figure 4.3. Enuaraq-Strauss, Killaq Shayna. @TheEllenShow India Bans Seal Fur! 9 Apr. 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/killages>.



Figure 4.4. Larter, Nikita. Seals Are Integral to Inuit Culture @TheEllenShow @peta. 6 Apr. 2018, <https://twitter.com/LarterNikita>.

As the campaign has picked up steam across circumpolar communities, anti-sealers have made vicious personal attacks on advocates of the hashtag. Award-winning Inuk throat singer, artist, and author Tanya Tagaq has been cruelly harassed by animal rights activists. In 2014, the singer tweeted a “sealfie” featuring her infant next to a seal killed by Elder hunters for a community meal in Iqaluktuuttiaq (Cambridge Bay), Nunavut. Animal rights activists attacked both Inuit culture and Tagaq, calling for her children to be removed from her care and posting disturbing, graphic digitally edited images of her and her family (Tanya Tagaq #sealfie Provokes Anti-sealing Activists). This is not the first time that People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has launched a disturbing digital assault on sealing. During the 2010 Olympics, PETA posted a graphic on their website that reworked the already culturally

appropriative Inunguat Olympic logo into “a stone man clubbing a baby seal to death as blood drips from the Olympic rings” (Gatehouse).



Figure 4.5. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. *Olympic Anti Seal Hunt Logo*. 2009.

The logo was a statement against the commercial East Coast seal hunt, PETA claims, although the striking use of the Inuit cultural symbol led viewers to make a startling link between Inuit and sealing. Although digital assaults on #sealfie are on-going, in response to the movement, PETA and the Humane Society International have issued similar statements supporting Inuit sealing while condemning commercial hunting (Ferrerias). One of the issues is that Inuit artists and hunters need to sell seal skins on the international commercial market to make money. The protests by PETA and similar organizations are influencing policies by convincing governmental bodies to

ban the trade of seal products, which makes earning money from seal hunting in any capacity nearly impossible.

Despite the continued anti-sealing attacks, the social media movement continues to be strong. The 2015 documentary film *Angry Inuk* by Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, addresses how “Inuit hunters in tiny remote communities in the high Arctic are negatively affected by animal rights groups protesting against the Canadian East Coast seal hunt” (Arnaquq-Baril Documentary). The film was shown in the Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival and was the winner of the 2016 Hot Docs Vimeo on Demand Audience Award. This documentary specifically chronicles how Inuit are engaging with social media to reframe the harmful narrative surrounding animal rights outside the Arctic community (Barnard). Here, Arnaquq-Baril describes the impacts on the international banning of seal products:

Since our hunters live in tiny remote communities and don't necessarily speak English, the Government of Nunavut arranges for a wildlife officer in each community to buy skins from hunters throughout the year. Then the government collects all the skins from all the communities and combines them for sale at the international auction on the hunter's behalf. This is how Inuit take part in the global commercial sealskin market. This allows us to continue our traditions and take part in the modern world. It was our main economy for over 100 years. But in 1983, everything changed. . . . Greenpeace, the international fund for animal welfare and other groups put out intense anti-sealing campaigns throughout the 1970s and 80s. As a result in 1983 the European Union banned products made from white coat harp seal pups. Even though the legislation targeted one type of seal skin, that we don't even sell, the campaigns ruined the reputation for all types of seal skin and the whole market crashed immediately. It was our great depression. (*Angry Inuk* 18:55)

Raising awareness for Inuit hunters and the sustainability of selling seal skins from communities is paramount for Inuit and at the heart of the #sealfie movement.

In the spring of 2016, Inuit again took to social media to protest cultural misrepresentation and fight for artists' rights in opposition to *Of the North*, a compilation film assembled by Quebecois artist Dominic Gagnon. Gagnon created a narrative of northern life by piecing together 74 minutes of publicly available videos of intoxicated adults, neglected children, animal and environmental abuse, and sexually explicit scenes. The film was produced over two years and partially funded by a \$32,000 public grant from the Conseil des Arts et Lettres du Québec (Staniforth). The title *Of the North* led viewers to assume that the clips were originally posted by Inuit in the Canadian Arctic. However, many scenes used for the film were posted from southern geographic locations by non-Inuit authors (Arnaquq-Baril, et al.). The problem is that the film functions as a documentary of Inuit reality in the Arctic, deceiving the viewer. People throughout the Arctic community spoke out against the film on Twitter and other social media outlets using #ofthenorth.<sup>12</sup> The community criticized Gagnon and the use of public funding for a project perpetuating prejudice against and racist imagery of Arctic peoples. Additionally, Gagnon committed copyright infringement on northern visual and performance artists by using music and video footage without permission. The campaign was successful in removing the film from festival line-ups.

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<sup>12</sup> See Twitter, #ofthenorth.



*Of the North* has been taken offline, with Gagnon under threat of several lawsuits (Nakonechny).

## **Conclusion: Decolonization and Reframing the Conversation on Arctic Life**

Community advocacy through social media is an important step in the fight for decolonization of ICT as well as a critical platform for Inuit voices to come together in the Inuit futurisms movement. However, slow and expensive broadband continues to act as a barrier to Inuit control over digital voices and cultural representation. Although Inuit across the north are going online at an increasing rate, as long as restricted northern internet access remains, southern systems of control over Inuit voices and representations will be maintained. The restricted access to ICT perpetuates the history of Canadian Arctic culture as predominantly informed in mainstream media by the work of non-Inuit anthropologists, academics, art dealers, curators, and collectors. Accounts of life and artistic expression in the Arctic are inconsistent and biased towards a southern perspective and market (Graburn *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World* 3). A continuous cycle of restricted access has led to sustained discriminatory and misinformed representation of Arctic life and culture in the media (Crandall *Inuit Art: A History*). Through innovative telecommunication technologies, social networking has become the most important medium for Inuit self-representation and activism in a historical narrative, as explored in Chapter 5, that has been dominated by a Western, southern voice.

Expanding on the arguments of Jason Edward Lewis, robust, equitable internet connections will give Inuit developers the space for future artistic engagement in the futurisms movement, reflect modern Inuit life through new works, to educate others about how the principles of IQ can be applied in digital media, and to bring the production of first-mile technologies to Nunavut. Although Western media promotes capitalism and colonialist ideologies, Indigenous communities use ICT to strengthen cultural ties within and outside of local environments. Furthermore, the creation and dissemination of Indigenous digital content reflects social values and knowledge and pushes back on the boundaries of colonialism. Through social media platforms such as Facebook, as seen in the #sealfie and #ofthenorth movements, Inuit activists are leveraging art to reframe the conversation about Arctic life and culture. Although challenged by limited connectivity, the #sealfie movement demonstrates that content generated by community members provides culturally strengthening opportunities to communicate with local, national, and international networks.

As argued by Vizenor, colonial politics are intended to disrupt cultural survivance (Vizenor, Morris and Anthes). Assimilative laws created and implemented by the Government of Canada were used to facilitate the oppression of Indigenous cultures (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 47). It is time for systemic change in order to shift Inuit leadership into positions of control over technological infrastructure so that creative solutions designed by and for Inuit in remote and isolated locations can be implemented and ultimately achieve growth in the arts and crafts sector in Nunavut. It is time for equal and open access to the latest advancements in broadband and ICT

so that Nunavummiut can even the playing field in the contemporary arts and utilize these technologies to innovate within the vitally important arts and crafts sector.

## CHAPTER 5: HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON THE CONTEMPORARY INUIT ART MARKET OF NUNAVUT

There are many challenges to decolonizing Nunavut's arts economy stemming from the early commercial structure of the Inuit art market in the late 1940s–1950s. The market continues to be run on a distribution system depending on southern-based institutions to sell works. The demand of costly shipping and, since the 1990s, the lack of an affordable, reliable internet service maintains the need for southern representatives to market the works of Inuit artists. Due to the lack of sectoral innovation, this out-dated third-party distribution system has continued instead of allowing communities to take hold of the market and find innovative solutions to northern challenges.

Visionary artist Alootook Ipellie confronts the establishment of the art market as the vehicle of colonial control in the introduction to his book *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*, where he writes,

Right until the 1940s, the Canadian Arctic was still considered one of the last frontiers in an increasingly shrinking world. It was the last bastion of a distinctive culture, largely untouched by any civilized nation, including Canada. Even though the land and its harsh climate seemed unwelcoming to outsiders; the predicament of hardship caused by famine and disease made it much easier for the assimilators to use their perceived magical solutions to win the trust of Inuit. The catalyst for the administrators, who wanted to convert a nomadic people to manageable collectives, was the natural friendliness of Inuit to other peoples. With one giant, index finger, the assimilators went about enticing the psyche of the downtrodden Inuit in the manner of professional prostitutes: 'You can see the goods. Now, come and get them. Your culture in payment for mine.' There is an oft-told story of how a certain Arctic administrator magically transformed the natural artistic talents of the Inuit into what is today a multi-million-dollar Inuit art industry.

The now-famous Inuit Cooperative movement in the Canadian Arctic encouraged Inuit to produce arts and crafts to supplement their incomes. A select number of Inuit have become either expert carvers, printmakers, embroiderers, weavers, or painters. A few are now world-renowned in their particular disciplines of art. In this imperfect world, according to the response to their work, they have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams and expectations. One feels proud of these Inuit artists who have the skill and creative imagination to take advantage of other people's search for a unique piece of art unlike any found in a competitive art world. (xii–xiii)

When Ipellie mentions the “oft-told story” “of a certain Arctic administrator”, he is referring to James Houston, a southern artist and administrator who is credited with discovering Inuit art and establishing the market for it. Houston brought together existing organizations to establish and capitalize on an arts network around Arctic communities that included training, production, distribution, marketing, and sales. This chapter looks at the creation narrative of the art market in Nunavut as the pinnacle of colonial practice in the region and examines southern representations of Nunavummiut artists over the last 70 years. To understand how the market developed, it is important to look back at the sociocultural and political landscape of Canada at that time.

### **Inuit Art: Canada's Post-War Project**

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Canada experienced a surge of post-war cultural independence that fuelled a search for a distinct national identity.<sup>13</sup> As Anthony Hlykna, Member of Parliament from 1940 to 1949 stated in 1945, “Although we have drawn upon Great Britain for most of what we possess in the way of culture, traditions, history, institutions, our way of life, and ventures of experience in practical statecraft, we nevertheless have now arrived at the stage where we must begin to develop our own distinctive character” (Mann 28). After World War II, Canadian nationalism began to emerge from British and French colonial heritage. As political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson (1936–2015) writes, “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined ... regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as deep horizontal comradeship” (6–7). By 1950, this theory of conceptualizing the unity of a nation through culture was fully recognized and put into practice by politicians in Ottawa. In a broadcast on citizenship in 1950, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent (1948–1957) stated, “The greater Canada becomes and the greater our pride in Canada the greater our value to the Commonwealth. Everything we do to increase our pride in Canada contributes to the importance of our place in the partnership of Commonwealth nations” (Mann 39). While Prime Minister St. Laurent did

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<sup>13</sup> French and British expeditions explored, colonized, and had violent conflicts over lands across North America beginning in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1763, the British defeated the French in the Seven Years’ War, and British colonization and control of the nation formally began. From this time through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Anglophone Canadians regarded the country as a British nation, which was reflected in its society, culture, and political and legal frameworks (Mann 16).

not advocate for a division from the United Kingdom, national pride was clearly equated to an identity that was distinctly Canadian. The establishment of a clear Canadian cultural policy was needed to give citizens of the budding nation a sense of togetherness, pride, and unifying cultural characteristics.

Later that year, the report *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences: 1949–1951*, which defines a nationalist cultural policy, was adopted by the federal government. Also known as the *Massey Report*, the Royal Commission served to construct Canadian identity in terms of sovereignty from American, British, and French colonialism through a strong hegemonic (and Anglophone) culture. A unified culture inspires nationalism despite history; as Anderson states, “It is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts — show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles” (146). To cultivate the cultural sector to instil social ties throughout the population, the federal government invested in national arts institutions, education, and programming (Finlay, Report of the Royal Commission). According to the report, cultural sovereignty equalled political sovereignty.

A section of the *Massey Report* discusses the changing landscape of Indigenous arts and handicrafts, noting that colonization had reduced Indigenous arts and crafts to “degraded objects mass-produced for the tourist trade” (Report of the Royal Commission 240). The report recommended introducing new educational initiatives in Indigenous arts for non-Native Canadians, as well as strategies in marketing and publicity, to increase the value of Indigenous handicrafts and inspire new modes of

creation within Indigenous communities. The report states, “The Indian groups [sic] with their ingenuity and taste, their traditional designs, and the special articles which they alone produce, have a valuable contribution to make to this part of Canadian cultural life” (Report of the Royal Commission 242). In parallel to the release of the *Massey Report*, and building off its ideals, the market for Inuit art was simultaneously being formed as a distinctly Canadian cultural enterprise.

By the time the Inuit art market had officially formed in the late 1940s, colonial culture already had a longstanding fascination with Inuit life, and thus there was a demand for cultural objects from the Arctic. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ethnographical shows or “human zoos” began to exploit Indigenous cultures as “exotic attractions”. Advertised as “savage Aborigines from an exotic land”, these exhibitions travelled throughout Europe and the Americas and could attract as many as 20,000 visitors per day (Rondot). An example of Inuit exploitation occurred in the autumn of 1880 when eight Inuit from Labrador were persuaded to travel to Germany for one year to join a show with promises of money. Once in Germany, they were forcibly exhibited in a zoo with wild animals until each member of the group succumbed to smallpox (Lutz vii). Abraham Ulrikab was a community leader and set off on this voyage with his family.





Figure 5.1. *The Ulrikab family: From left: Ulrike, Tobias, Abraham, Maria (on Ulrike's lap) and Sara (standing). 1880. Unity Archives. Herrhut, Germany.*

Abraham and his family suffered greatly during the time they were held captive in Germany. He kept a journal where he wrote of violent punishments by his captors, having to perform for thousands of people per day, overwhelming crowding in their living enclosure, and extremely cold conditions (Lutz). During the time of their captivity in Berlin, the group demonstrated aspects of Inuit culture such as hunting or kayaking around a small pond. A Sunday at their enclosure could draw over 17,000 visitors (Rondot). Ulrikab wrote, "We often suffer from colds, too, are often sick in Berlin and are very homesick and miss our land, our relatives, and our church. The food here is no good. We don't lack dry bread; we also get some fish. Because of the fish we take

some refreshment. . . . In Berlin, it is not really nice since it is impossible because of people and trees, indeed, because so many children come. The air is constantly buzzing from the sound of the walking and driving; our enclosure is filled up immediately. . . . Indeed, going out by daytime is impossible because of all the people, because we are totally surrounded by them, by many very different faces” (Lutz 9–13). Similar shows were exhibited in North America. “Authentic Living Eskimo Villages” were created for the World’s Fair in 1893 (*World’s Columbian Exposition* in Chicago), 1904 (*Louisiana Purchase Exposition* in St. Louis), and 1909 (*Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition* in Seattle).



Figure 5.2. Nowell, Frank H. *Eskimos with Dogsleds, Eskimo Exhibit, Pay Streak, Alaska*

*Yukon Pacific Exposition, Seattle, 1909.* 1909. Photo used with permission of University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, AYP613. Seattle, Washington.

These exhibitions placed Inuit men, women, and children on display in artificial igloos and environments. In addition to being able to meet a “live Eskimo family” at the 1939 *The World of Tomorrow Exhibition* at the New York fair, the National Gallery of Canada curated an exhibition on Inuit life consisting of household and hunting items that had been collected by the 1938 Eastern Arctic Patrol<sup>14</sup> (Crandall *Inuit Art: A History* 40). There was high public demand for details about Arctic life. Inuit culture was mythicized and frequently described in Canadian and American media and academic texts as primitive people struggling to survive in an unforgiving, almost otherworldly environment.

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<sup>14</sup> In an effort to assert sovereignty throughout the Arctic region, in 1922 the Government of Canada began an annual patrol to construct and sustain regulatory posts. The Eastern Arctic Patrols ran for 46 years until 1968. Patrols were led by government administrators and the RCMP and transported doctors, researchers, and court officials to the high Arctic (Mackinnon 93).

Material has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Image title: *The Happy Gypsy of the Cold North: His Life Is Hard, His Worldly Goods Are Few, yet the Eskimo Is Always Good-Natured.*

Image description: (Left) Inuit hunter holding a harpoon while surveying a body of water. (Right) Inuit woman chewing an animal skin to soften for use while embraced by small child in an *amauti*. An *amauti* is parka with a large pouch sewn in the back under the hood which holds a small child. Both images are black and white.

Figure 5.3. Putnam, George Palmer. "The Happy Gypsy of the Cold North: His Life Is Hard, His Worldly Goods Are Few, yet the Eskimo Is Always Good-Natured." New York Times, 6 Nov. 1927, p. SM6.

The happiest people in the North, then, are the most primitive. Obviously, (psychologists please affirm) simplicity breeds mental comfort and perplexity makes for worry. But there is a price to pay for this species of contentment. Even to escape 'nerves,' bad tempers and indigestion, few would wish to set back the clock of human progress to the Stone Age. And it is on the very edge of the Stone Age these Far Northern Eskimos exist. Their Survival depends solely on the chase, with starvation forever lurking on the gloom of a possible gameless tomorrow. (Putnam 1927)

### Eskimo Buys Refrigerator!



Stewart Edgar of Toronto achieved the salesman's dream at the Canadian National Exhibition when he sold an electric refrigerator to the Eskimos who set up an authentic village on the Exhibition grounds. They are not interested so much in the food-preserving qualities of the machine as in its rapid output of delectable ice cubes, which they munch as rapidly as the trays will produce them. An Eskimo housewife is shown putting some Arctic artichokes on a shelf.

Figure 5.4. "Eskimo Buys Refrigerator!" The Globe and Mail (1936–Current); Toronto, Ont., Sept. 1937, p. 5. This content is shared with the permission of Globe and Mail Inc. and may not be used outside this dissertation.

They are not interested so much in the food-preserving qualities of the machine as in its rapid output of delectable ice cubes, which they munch as rapidly as the trays will produce them. An Eskimo housewife is shown putting some Arctic artichokes on a shelf. (Eskimo Buys Refrigerator! 1937)

### North Dwellers 'Bushed,' Returned Artist Thinks

Should Wed Squaw and Live Like Eskimos Up There, Says Johnston

Arctic Vengeance From Eldorado Looms Over the Head of 'Betrayer'

Figure 5.5. "North Dwellers 'Bushed,' Returned Artist Thinks: Should Wed Squaw and Live Like Eskimos Up There, Says Johnston Arctic Vengeance From Eldorado Looms Over the Head of 'Betrayer.'" The Globe and Mail (1936–Current); Toronto, Ont., 15 July 1939, p. 4. This content is shared with the permission of Globe and Mail Inc. and may not be used outside this dissertation.

The Eskimos built him an igloo when he stayed at one of the sealing camps on the Coppermine River. . . . 'I couldn't eat the Eskimo food. I couldn't eat their fish oil and seal oil, so I ate chocolate bars. They reach into a big pot and grab all together and if they don't like what they grab they put it back. I'd rather starve than eat with them. But they are the most cheerful people in the world. . . . A man who goes up to work among the Eskimos and doesn't smile, won't live long.' Mr. Johnston said. (North Dwellers 'Bushed' 1939)

By the mid-1940s, the stage for the Inuit art market was set. On one side there was a strong public thirst with a long-standing interest in Inuit culture, which translated into investors and buyers. On the other was the emergence of Canadian nationalism through which Inuit art was considered an “originally Canadian”, distinctive form of expression. Three pivotal organizations recognized these conditions and played critical roles in the establishment of the Inuit art market under the direction of James Houston: the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (now known as La Guilde), and the Government of Canada.

The Hudson’s Bay Company was heavily invested in the Arctic<sup>15</sup> and tried unsuccessfully to launch an art market between 1929 and 1945 (Watt 11). After the Great Depression and into the World War II era, demand for fox fur, which had been a vast and lucrative commercial enterprise for approximately 250 years, declined sharply. During the 1930s, HBC established a monopoly in the Northwest Territories as other companies withdrew from the region (Usher 16–17, Mitchell 90). To keep itself afloat, HBC looked towards Inuit art because it had access to communities and artists as well

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<sup>15</sup> For nearly two centuries, HBC has maintained a long-established presence in the Arctic region. Between 1670 and 1869, the company held an exclusive trade charter over an enormous land claim called Rupert’s Land. The trade charter gave HBC exclusive rights to trade in and colonize all lands containing rivers flowing into Hudson Bay and the entire Hudson Bay drainage system. The charter covered 3.9 million square kilometers of land extending from what is now northern Québec and Labrador, northern and western Ontario, the entirety of Manitoba, the majority of Saskatchewan, south and central Alberta, parts of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and small sections of the United States (Davis 14, S. Smith). In 1870, HBC sold the land to the Government of Canada, which is the largest real estate transaction in the country’s history. Although it no longer had exclusive trading rights after the sale, HBC cultivated its roots in the Arctic and continued to grow.

as an established distribution chain with trade routes in the north and stores in the south (HBC's Interest in the Inuit Art Market). During slow seasons in trapping, managers within the company encouraged hunters to carve works to sell to military officers. The Hudson's Bay Company organized a small carving industry in the 1940s in Lake Harbor around a United States military base where officers would purchase souvenirs, which created a temporary and inflated market (Mitchell 169). However, due to the economic downturn of the country, HBC was not able to establish a profitable market. It was not until HBC partnered with La Guilde in Montreal in the late 1940s that a market became possible.

Founded in 1906, La Guilde, formally known as the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (1908–1967), played an important role in the creation of the contemporary Inuit art market. La Guilde was founded as a national organization to

1. Encourage, retain, revise, and develop Canadian handicrafts and art industries throughout the country;
  2. Prevent loss, extinction, and deterioration of the same;
  3. Encourage home industry by making it profitable and honourable;
  4. Aid people skilled in such crafts and industries by providing markets for their products in Canada and abroad; and
  5. Educate the public on the value of such arts, industries and crafts.
- (Watt 11)

A primary interest of La Guilde's members was to encourage Native Peoples to create "good traditional crafts" and organize exhibitions on behalf of Indigenous artists. Building on the international fascination with Inuit culture, in the late fall of 1930, La Guilde held an Inuit art exhibition at the McCord Museum in Montreal. This exhibit was the first curated display exclusively dedicated to Inuit craft and featured ivory carvings

and pencil drawings as well as tools and hunting items (McLeod 20). The exhibition received attention from the Canadian public and media, as well as international attention from the *New York Times*.

**Material has been removed due to copyright restrictions.**

Image title: *Eskimo Art Shown*

Image description:  
Newspaper clipping of original 1930 article that appeared in the New York Times on December 19, 1930.

Figure 5.6. "Eskimo Art Shown." New York Times, 14 Dec. 1930, p. E6. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

An unusual exhibition of the art and handicrafts of the Eskimos, Canada's primitives of the Northland, attracted a great deal of interest here when it was shown in the McCord National Museum of McGill University. There were specimens of tools, implements and weapons, and in addition a large number of pencil drawings of Eskimo life done by one Enooesweetok of Baffinland. They were crude efforts, but accurate in detail and a graphic illustration of life in the sub-Arctic. (Eskimo Art Shown 1930)

The exhibit at the McCord Museum marked a new mission for La Guilde: to establish a market around Inuit arts and handicraft. By 1939, the organization changed the name of its established Indian Committee to the Indian and Eskimo Committee to support the creation and marketing of Inuit creative works (Watt 11, Mitchell 169). Part



of La Guilde's mission was to "prevent loss, extinction, and deterioration" of Canadian handicrafts and art, which was one reason the organization felt entitled to "save" Inuit culture, as noted in La Guilde's 1939 annual meeting minutes: "... poor hunting years in the North caused acute suffering and deprivation among the people and this condition might be alleviated by developing a market for Eskimo Crafts in the South" (Watt 11).

As Houston notes in *Eskimo Handicrafts: A Private Guide for the Hudson's Bay Company Manager*, this effort coincided with the federal government's interest in transforming Inuit communities into capitalist, wage-based societies. As a result, the government granted La Guilde money to cover the salary and expenses of sending an administrator north to guide artists to produce works to sell to southern Canadians (2).

"Saving Indigenous heritage" for the benefit of Canada as a whole, as Ipellie describes, is a recurring theme throughout the history of the promotion of Indigenous arts in Canada, and one that has particularly haunted the Inuit art sector. The colonial rescue narrative is replicated in several texts. In *From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite*, author Marybelle Mitchell (formerly the executive director of the Inuit Art Foundation) describes the art market being constructed as the fur and hunting trade suddenly ended in the Arctic. Mitchell writes, "It was a timely intervention, as 1948–49 was when the fur trade collapsed. Prices for skins had sharply declined and people who survived that period — many did not — recall the starvation and death that ravaged their camps. . . . [La Guilde] early perceived what was to become an important function of carving: that it could provide 'a form of relief'" (Mitchell 170–171). This notion of selling Inuit art as a saving grace for communities was widely replicated in mainstream media despite the fact that the challenges Inuit communities were facing,

such as over-hunting, disease, and forced relocation, were caused by European and southern Canadian institutions.

An excerpt from a 1951 *Globe and Mail* article exemplifies the tone of that time: “Now when any of their usual sources of income or food supply fail — when there is a bad fox season or the walrus hunt fails to provide food for men and dogs — they can turn their crafts, for which they are paid chits,<sup>16</sup> which may be redeemed at the Hudson’s Bay post for tobacco, tea, billets, or whatever they need. . . . A true primitive art of the Eskimo who succeed in capturing the essential nature of the creatures around them” (Purser). In the minds of La Guilde’s Indian and Eskimo Committee, not only were they preserving a piece of “originally Canadian” craft, but they were also rescuing Inuit communities from desolation. Alooook Ipellie addresses this issue embedded in the development in the Arctic:

Looking back to recent Inuit history, I used to question the presence of the so-called ‘Arctic administrators’ who were regularly sent to northern communities to provide authority over the lives of Inuit. Having once been subjected to some of their determined efforts to recreate us as human beings much like themselves, I have often wondered how much longer they intend to play ‘god’ in our lives. These administrators were looked upon by our ancestors as demigods in times of hardship and starvation on the land. These are the same people who, over time, gradually took away the ability of the majority of Inuit to survive on this same land by forcing them to settle in communities where they could no longer practice their traditional pursuits. When Inuit became helplessly trapped in the midst of their cultural upheaval, the administrators went out of their way to provide the goods and services to rescue them. Thereby this guaranteed the

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<sup>16</sup> A short official note or voucher typically recording a sum owed. In 1951, the Inuit art market was burgeoning; however, as southern institutions were earning significant income, artists were paid unfair wages occasionally in the form of tobacco and tea.

administrators the dubious honor of becoming ‘saviors’ of Inuit. (*Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* xi)

One such administrator was a Canadian artist named James Houston. After World War II, Houston, a young artist who had yet to make his mark on the Canadian art scene, travelled north, following in the footsteps of his artistic forebears, the Group of Seven, to discover “Canadian art” for himself. As he describes in his book *Confessions of an Igloo Dweller*, Houston took a long train journey through Ontario to Moosonee<sup>17</sup> seeking artistic inspiration in the “purely Canadian” landscapes and the Native Peoples who lived on the land. There, by chance, he was offered a ride on a Canadian Air Force plane bound for Inukjuak (Port Harrison), where a meteorological station had been established as part of the war effort. Houston became interested in Inuit carvings in the small settlements and Inuit out-camps along the east coast of Hudson Bay (Graburn *The Discovery of Inuit Art* 3). Houston writes, “I was given two more small carvings and encouraged to keep them. I had seen such ancient ivory carvings in the Royal Ontario Museum with my father and later in museums in London and Paris. Two of these carvings seemed as robust and powerful as the small objects I had seen from the caves of Europe that had been carved as many as 15,000 to 20,000 years ago, following Europe’s last ice age” (*Confessions of an Igloo Dweller* 11). He brought back

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<sup>17</sup> Moosonee is located in northern Ontario 19 kilometres south of James Bay and is the only saltwater port in the province. Due to its close proximity to the Arctic as well as its air and seaports, Moosonee was said to be the “gateway to the Arctic” in the 20th century.

several sculptures to La Guilde in Montreal, which had an immediate interest in his work. Houston writes,

The Guild was the oldest, most respected, non-profit organization of that kind in Canada, founded at the turn of the last century. Jack Molson got in touch with the Hudson's Bay Company, first at Beaver Hall Hill in Montreal and then at their offices in Winnipeg. As Norman Ross<sup>18</sup> had suggested to me, we developed a credit line, a chit system, between HBC and the Guilde, where I would be able to write the amount to be paid for a carving and give it to the carver and he would in turn be able to trade that amount at any HBC post at any time. . . . It seems in retrospect remarkable that the whole enterprise worked so well. (*Confessions of an Igloo Dweller* 18)

It was then, in 1948, that Houston addressed the Indian and Eskimo Committee about his plan to “encourage” the production of Inuit art within Arctic communities. As recorded in the Indian and Eskimo Committee Meeting Minutes for November 18, 1948, “Mr. J. A. Houston of Grandmère who visited Port Harrison [now Inukjuak] during the past summer spoke to the committee at some length about his plan to encourage craft work among the Eskimos of that district. Mr. Houston felt very strongly that the latent skills of the Eskimos could be brought forth if there was someone on the spot to encourage them” (Watt 11). Houston requested financial support from La Guilde, which

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<sup>18</sup> Norman Ross was the HBC post manager in Inukjuak (Port Harrison) during the time of Houston's travels and continued to be the point of contact throughout the 1950s. Houston credits Ross with making the business arrangements on behalf of HBC (Crandall *Inuit Art: A History* 72, Wight).

he received in the form of Federal grants,<sup>19</sup> and proposed to distribute the works through HBC, who agreed to trade food and supplies for good pieces of craft work (Mitchell 169). James Houston successfully built a partnership between the government for funding, La Guilde for marketing and curatorial support, and HBC for sales and distribution. Houston, acting as the arts educator and purchasing guide, successfully structured a capitalist market around Inuit art in 1948.

### **Growing the Market: The Legacy of Colonial Control**

In the early years of developing the Inuit art market, southern institutions focused on production around Hudson Bay stemming from the success of renowned artists such as Kenojuak Ashevak, Kiawak Ashoona, and Pudlo Pudlat, all hailing from what is now Nunavut, formerly the Northwest Territories. Market development programs funded by the federal government operated out of specific communities, mainly Kinngait (Cape Dorset, Nunavut), Inukjuak (Port Harrison, Quebec), and Puvirnituq, Quebec (Watt 17). The community of Kinngait (Cape Dorset, Nunavut), in particular, became known as a hotbed of Inuit arts and crafts production in the Canadian Arctic and was marketed heavily by southern institutions. Market development programs controlled all aspects of art production from determining creation methods, mediums, and marketing narratives to cash flow and artist payments.

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<sup>19</sup> Even before the founding of the national arts funding body the Canada Council for the Arts in 1957, the federal government provided grants for the development of the Inuit art market in the Arctic (Mitchell 170).

Sponsored and strongly encouraged by the federal government, through Houston, HBC and La Guilde carefully crafted both the production and sales of the market. The first publication was *Eskimo Handicrafts* in 1951. Intended for distribution to artists and HBC managers, it both illustrates and describes works Houston thought would sell in the market. The introduction states, “It is the first of a series to be published in Eskimo for the people of the Canadian Arctic, to encourage them in their native arts. It is hoped that the illustrations will suggest to them some of their objects which are useful and acceptable to the white man” (Houston 1). Although Houston notes that Inuit artists are the masters of the materials, he dictates six rules for selling arts and crafts that outline production standards for works to be set by the HBC manager at hand, including the preferred age of ivory, the importance of cleanliness of works made from skin, and ensuring that sculptures are not too fragile to ship (1). These rules are followed by 30 illustrations by Houston of “acceptable” works including carvings of peg games, knives, nature, baskets, boxes, needle holders, feather dusters, and wearables made from skin.

An updated version of this publication was produced in 1953 entitled *Eskimo Handicrafts: A Private Guide for the Hudson’s Bay Company Manager*. This document instructed HBC store managers on what works were not selling as well in the south and therefore what not to buy from artists. Houston states in the introduction, “Your part will be to purchase as carefully and wisely as possible. To take great care in packing and shipping to avoid damage to goods. In this way we can all help the Eskimos help themselves. Certain handicrafts of the Eskimo have sold extremely well and others very poorly. There have been various reasons for this which generally fall into two categories

in speaking of unsaleable work” (Houston 2). He divides Inuit art objects into two categories:

1. Work that is undesirable and unsalable; and
2. Work that is desirable but unsalable because of poor or careless workmanship.

Houston directs the managers to follow one rule when purchasing work: “Would you want it yourself or as a gift to a friend” (4). For the most part, Houston instructs managers as he instructs artists to purchase carvings and skin wearables that display a high level of craftsmanship; are clean, well polished, and well designed; and represent the culture and resources of the region. However, over time, Houston was influenced by trends in the southern market. Some works he instructed artists to create in 1951, such as ashtrays, match/needle holders, and cribbage boards, he directed managers not to purchase in 1953. He states, “Our agents and customers are looking for primitive work by a primitive people. This term primitive does not mean that the work is crude since many primitive people have made extremely delicate crafts, but it is true that the ashtray, pen holder, and cribbage board do not represent the Eskimo culture and as a result there is little interest in buying that type of work” (*Eskimo Handicrafts: A Private Guide for the Hudson’s Bay Company Manager* 3, Crandall 97–98). Together the federal government and southern institutions meticulously curated the market, even destroying “work by children [or adults] that were deemed unsaleable” (Mitchell 171).

In 1954, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources Jean Lesage wrote of Inuit artists,

Their lives as semi-nomadic hunters have sharpened their keen sense of observation. This ability serves them in their portrayal of animal and human

forms as well as in the hunt. Their appreciation of essential detail and their mastery of form and motion are immediately apparent.

Since 1949 the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, a non-profit organization which has done much to further Canadian arts and crafts, has sent representatives to the Arctic to encourage and preserve Eskimo art. The Hudson's Bay Company has given full co-operation. The Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources takes an active interest in the work of Eskimo artists. The steadily growing recognition of the work of a people still practicing a strong primitive art in the modern world has proved a great help to the Eskimo economy. (*Canadian Eskimo Art* 1)

The representation of Inuit artists as a “primitive culture” ran deep within government policy, media, and academic texts. At this time, organizations such as La Guilde, HBC, and the Arctic cooperatives<sup>20</sup> that formed around the market purchased or commissioned works in exchange for goods or cash to ensure artists were paid immediately (Martijn 561, Mitchell 169). The works were then exported and distributed

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<sup>20</sup> Around the 1960s, an international movement emerged within colonial countries to force capitalist development in colonized communities by establishing cooperatives (co-ops) to stimulate self-reliance and economic growth. Co-ops are permanent, locally and jointly owned organizations run through democratic collective entrepreneurship to meet common economic, cultural, and social needs (MacPherson 139–140). In the Canadian Arctic, co-ops flourished within communities. Inuit leaders mirrored the governing structure of the organization to Inuit sharing culture, responding to local needs. The first co-ops were established in 1959 at Kangiqsualujjuaq (George River) in Québec and in Killineq (Port Burwell) and Kinngait (Cape Dorset) in Nunavut. Services offered in co-ops include arts and crafts production and sales (the most successful example of this is the West Baffin Eskimo Co-Operative in Kinngait [Cape Dorset]), fur harvesting, retail and grocery stores, and telecommunications services. The Arctic Co-operatives Limited (formerly known as the Canadian Arctic Co-operative Federation, established in 1972) is the Inuit-owned and controlled federation of co-ops that represents 32 communities across Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon (Canadian Arctic Producers, Arctic Co-ops: History, MacPherson).



through southern and international commercial galleries and auctions, which is how the market is largely organized to this day.<sup>21</sup> Often artists were neither notified nor received extra pay if the sale of their work earned more than their original fee. Artists lost track of their work and the work of their families, and like their communities, remained oblivious to the oeuvres of local artists. After the initial success of sales of carvings, La Guilde charged Houston with inspiring Inuit carvers to mass-produce art that could be sold in the southern market. He travelled back north and is credited with introducing printmaking, drawing, and painting to Inuit artists. As cultural anthropologist Nelson Graburn describes,

He encouraged the men to carve small figures out of soapstone, hitherto used mainly for making lamps and pots. For inspiration, Inuit drew on the traditional repertoire of models they had earlier carved from ivory for souvenirs, children's toys, games, and grave goods. After Houston successfully exhibited the soapstone carvings in Montreal, the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, with government backing, prevailed upon him to return to the Arctic to further encourage Eskimo carving. In a decade, Houston's venture had transformed the Eskimo's economic situation from one of near starvation to a thriving, multimillion-dollar enterprise. Eskimo soapstone carving, and later printmaking, were to become the largest and most reliable source of earned income in the North. Moreover, these art forms eventually became a symbol of Canadian identity worldwide. (*Inuit Art and Canadian Nationalism* 6)

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<sup>21</sup> According to a December 5, 1961 correspondence from HBC to La Guilde, HBC estimated that items sold through retail outlets in the south were marked up approximately 60% after the original purchase from the artist. About 40% of the sale went towards the profit of the retailer, and 20% was taken to cover any shipping and handling fees (Ingram 5).

Through public and private donations, Houston acquired new materials for stone carving in Inuit society. Meanwhile, as a marketing ploy to engage the southern imagination, he published numerous works that discussed the plight of the Inuit, reinforced stereotypes displayed in mass media, and told stories of their magical histories that were represented in the context of the work that was being produced. In the early years, the appetite for the “exotic and primitive” Inuit art in the southern market grew quickly throughout Canada and the United States.

This narrative is apparent in the vast majority of writings and film about Inuit culture over the following decade. For example, in 1954 Houston published *Canadian Eskimo Art*, in which he describes Inuit as a “cheerful people,” destined to live in a harsh, unforgiving environment characterised by a constant struggle for food. He questioned the relevance of aesthetics to artists, stating that carvers are likely to consider their own work as worthless, are not likely to repeat subjects or themes, and seldom place importance on abstract thought. He writes,

It is difficult to discover what precise aesthetic satisfaction their art has for the Eskimos themselves. . . . In primitive minds throughout the world the idea has persisted that to make a likeness of anything helps to materialize it. The primitive magician has, since early times, painted, drawn, or modeled images of the animals on which he and his tribesmen depend for food. Perhaps the Eskimo hunter still attaches magical significance to the little models of the game he hopes to kill. (32)

He concludes that every piece of art is a representation of physical environment or historical folklore.

At the same time, the National Film Board of Canada was producing short films about Inuit for southern Canadian classrooms. These films, narrated by Anglophone

Canadians, reinforced stereotypes across the south. A film entitled *The Living Stone* (1958) details how carvers wait for stone to literally speak to them before they begin to carve a work. The narrator in this film describes carvers chanting “many magic words” to the sea in order to find food. In the story of the carving process, the film quotes an uncredited artist: “Nowadays we carve more and more for the tall, white *Qallunaat* men, but now, as then, we look at things in just the same way. First, a carver sees a creature hiding in the stone. Then, in his mind, he moves the creature until its form fits the stone. Then he cuts away until the true form emerges for everybody to see” (Feeney 20:40). Similarly, Dr. Diamond Jenness,<sup>22</sup> a leading anthropologist at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and member of La Guilde, produced a memoir in 1959 entitled *The People of the Twilight*, where he described Inuit: “timidity of these Eskimos came not from ordinary cowardice, but from a superstitious dread of the mysterious powers which they believed all white men possessed ... Their broad, smiling faces enliven our sober home, and their keen sense of humor led to many amusing incidents. They thought the panes of glass a novel kind of ice, and on their first visit could not distinguish the door from the rest of the house” (22–23). In this memoir Jenness describes his experiences before the war and before western technology reached the Arctic. He wrote of a simpler time, romanticizing Inuit life and portraying the simplicity of the people. This

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<sup>22</sup> Diamond Jenness advised the Canadian government in the creation of Arctic policy. In 1939, Dr Jenness sat on the Indian Committee of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, which began funding efforts to develop a market for Inuit art in southern Canada (Watt 11).

narrative, the myth of Inuit primitivism,<sup>23</sup> was used to market Inuit culture so that consumers would feel as if they were purchasing an archaeological artifact rather than a contemporary piece of art.

As art historian Ingo Hessel describes in *Inuit Modern*, Inuit art marketing represented “the sham facade of primitiveness”, noting that Inuit artists themselves were never a part of the conversation about art creation or Inuit culture. Hessel writes, “The stereotypical view of Inuit that evolved in the 1950s both colored the perception of Inuit art and in turn was reinforced by it. The image of a happy stoic peaceful race, barely emerged from the Stone Age threatened by modern civilization, on our very northern doorstep, was immensely appealing to Canada’s still-forming identity as a northern power and as a multicultural society with an exotic yet homegrown Aboriginal component” (62). While it is easy to dismiss these materials as perspectives of the past, the comments on the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) webpage for *The Living Stone* demonstrate the continued lack of understanding in the south. One commenter writes, “I just love this film. . . . Have long loved Eskimo ways of being/living since childhood ... in a way I ‘grew up’ with this as a hidden internal world of how people should be and relate in the world” (Feeney, Comments). The stereotypes from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century continue to permeate Canadian society, deeply challenging Inuit identity.

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<sup>23</sup> As described by Ingo Hessel in *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection*.

The 1950s saw the rise of a multi-million-dollar Inuit art industry that reached both southern Canadian and international buyers rooted in the Inuit “primitive” and “erasure” narratives (Watt 14). In 1951, the National Gallery in Ottawa held its first exhibition. In 1958, the first documented private collection was recorded. Inuit art was enveloped into the national brand by the 1960s as part of an effort to display Canada’s ownership of the Arctic on the international stage. As Graburn states in his article “Inuit Art and Canadian Nationalism”, “A powerful additional motivation for the state support of Inuit art derived from Canada’s need to carve out a national identity in the post-World War II world” (1986). Art by Inuit was, and continues to be, symbolic of the vast reach of the Canadian nation-state and the ancient cultures it surrounds.



Figure 5.7. Unknown artist. *Ookpik*. 1964. Silver jar seal skin doll. CBC Digital Archives. Photo courtesy of CBC Licensing. Ottawa, Ontario.

The *Ookpik*, Arctic owl, was selected to symbolize Canada at a 1964 Philadelphia trade show. This still was captured from a television broadcast entitled *Inquiry*. The host of the show states, "Symbolizing a nation is a tall order for a simple handicraft, but *Ookpik* has pulled it off. *Ookpik* may make a better Canadian mascot than the mighty beaver" (1964: *Ookpik Takes Canada by Storm*).<sup>24</sup> In the 1960s, sales of *Ookpiks* boomed across Canada and the US.



Figure 5.8. Canada Post. *Annual Stamp*

*Collection: 1977 Inuit Art Collection Canada.*

1977. Stamp block. Service Canada, Government of Canada. Ottawa, Ontario. © Canada Post

1977. Works Featured: Top Left: Unknown Artist.

*Seated Man with Speared Seal*. c. 20th Century.

Soapstone, bone, and hide. Figure: 15.0 x 15.0 x

18.0 cm. Seal: 6.3 x 19.5 x 9.5 cm. Vancouver Art

Gallery. Vancouver, British Columbia. Top Right:

Saila, Pitloosie. *Fisherman's Dream*. 1971.

Colour stonecut on laid japan paper. 42.5 x 60.3 cm. National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa, Ontario.

Bottom Left: Pitsiulak, Lypa [Lipa] and Solomon Karpik. *Disguised Archer*. 1976. Stonecut print.

58.4 x 78.7 cm. Bottom Right: Parr. *Hunters of Old*. 1974. Stonecut on paper. 60.0 x 85.0 cm.

West Baffin Eskimo Co-Operative Ltd., on loan to

<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that in the clip the narrator states that the work was altered to appear more "authentic". The original *Ookpik* for the trade show featured a ducked back and webbed feet. Looking for a more "traditional" symbol for Canada, the feet were removed and new ones created and replaced by show administrators at 2:30 AM the night before the opening (1964: *Ookpik Takes Canada by Storm*).

the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.  
Kleinburg, Ontario.

Figure 5.9. Rivera MacGregor, Elena. *Olympic Logo*. 2010. Rivera Designs. Vancouver, British Columbia.

Material has been removed  
due to copyright  
restrictions.

Image title: Vancouver 2010  
Olympic Logo

Image description:  
Multicolored *inunguat*  
(imitation of a person or  
imitation Inukshuk) in green,  
blue, red, and yellow  
standing on top of the  
words “Vancouver 2010”,  
above the symbolic  
Olympic rings in blue.

View original image here:  
<https://olympic.org/Vancouver2010>

The Inukshuk was the symbol chosen for the 2010 Olympic games held in Vancouver. This design was based on the Inukshuk (stone landmark or cairn) built by Alvin Kanak for the Northwest Territories Pavilion at Expo 86. MacGregor says of the design, “The Inukshuk conveys our basic human warmth and friendliness as Canadians and provides a fantastic symbol for the Friendship Games, not only for the visitors who will be arriving, but also to remind us of the values that make Canada a truly great place to live” (MacGregor 2010). The values she lists echo the romanticized view of the north perpetuated by anthropologists from the early mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. She continues, “related to the centuries-old tradition of dealing with a harsh, often unforgiving climate and landscape. We have always needed the help of others in order to live in this country, and, while there is definitely a core of rugged individualism, it’s tempered by a sense of friendliness and communal spirit that represents the very best of Canadian values” (MacGregor 2010). Before the launch of the logo, former Nunavut commissioner and artist Piita Irniq stated that the logo was an *inunguat* (meaning imitation of man, imitation of a person) and did not qualify as an Inukshuk, because this use was removed from cultural meaning and significance (CBC News). Regardless of Inuit protests, the logo was used to trademark the 2010 Olympics.



Figure 5.10. Bank of Canada. *Canadian Commemorative \$10 Banknote for Canada’s Sesquicentennial Featuring Owl’s Bouquet*, Originally Made Kenojuak Ashevak. 2017. Royal Canadian Mint. This image is reproduced with the permission of the Bank of Canada. Ottawa, Ontario.

From the 1960s forward, Inuit art was celebrated in part for its contribution to Canadian national identity. Recognizing the importance of Inuit art to the national visual culture and in an attempt to control the aesthetics, in 1961 the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND, now known as Indian and Northern Affairs Canada<sup>25</sup> [INAC]) founded the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council to influence and manage art production in the Arctic. The Canadian Eskimo Arts Council was a government advisory committee of arts professionals whose purpose was to give direction to printmakers and decide which prints would be sold in the south (Hessel / *am an Artist* 188). As the art historian Susan J. Gustavison describes in her book *Arctic Expressions: Inuit Art and the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council, 1961–1989*, “In the end, what is significant is that the federal government created an advisory body – the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council – that was without precedent, not only in the history of Canadian art but in the art of any country. Never before, or since, has the art production of a people been treated as an entity that could be scrutinized, directed, protected, and promoted like that art of the Inuit” (11). From its inception, the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council was controversial; as Gustavison recounts, there was public outcry from media outlets as well as Inuit communities condemning the role of the committee for hampering the creative freedom of artists and exploiting the market.

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<sup>25</sup> In August 2017 the Canadian government announced a plan to create two new departments: the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous Services Canada. At the time of writing this dissertation the transition from INAC to these new departments was in progress.



Cooperatives were justifiably upset with the imposed parameters of creation and the selection process of works to be sold because they not only invested in art creation but also were advocates for the self-determination of Inuit culture (15–17). As Ipellie writes,

Some years ago, I approached the so-called stewards of ‘Inuit Art’ to find out if they were interested in representing my work. Some of these stewards were appointees to the Eskimo Arts Council, which was a ruling body created by the Canadian Government to oversee and ultimately, to dictate which pieces of Inuit Art should be seen and put up for sale to the outside world. I also did my bit to interest employees of the Inuit Art Section of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs for the same purpose. Both of these exercises were to help me find my bearings within the so-called ‘Inuit Art World’ since I was an Inuk who happened to be an artist. Previous to that, I had often wondered whether or not these stewards would designate my work as a worthy part of the ‘monster’ they had created.

Their initial reaction to my work was obvious. Disinterest, at best. In the end, this made me ill tempered. Why was I a victim of their faint murmurs as they looked at my work? Was my work not easy to categorize and, therefore, did not fit the mould they had steadfastly built and helped protect on behalf of my fellow Inuit artists? These were the only conclusions I came to. However, a curious thing happened each time I went to see them. These stewards never volunteered to comment or hint with the few words of criticism I wanted for my own benefit. Instead, they stick-handled their way out of my reach with carefully selected phrases like: ‘Perhaps this or that person, or this or that gallery will advise you or show interest in exhibiting your work.’ (*Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* xvi–xvii)

Ipellie perfectly encapsulates the overarching issue with the Inuit art market in Nunavut: it was built by southern institutions that owned and controlled every aspect of its production, marketing, and distribution. In the 2018 Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) exhibition catalogue, *Tunirrusiangit: Kenojuak Ashevak and Tim Pitsiulak*, Inuk curator, performance, and written word artist Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory reflects on the beginnings of the art market in her poem “I am the light of Happiness”. Bathory writes,

There is a myth that Inuit did not have a concept of art before this modern age.  
 That there is no three-letter word for it, no full-time profession devoted to the  
 creation of it.  
 That the introduction of paper transformed everything.  
 Allow me to defy this notion by saying this:  
 There was no such thing as Canadian art before *Qinnuajuaq*.<sup>26</sup>  
 Canada is hand-drawn by *Qinnuajuaq*.  
 The lines that swooped in and rushed out at the same time,  
 The bulbs of power, the circles of light ...  
 outline and colour our modern identity.  
 Her deft fingers created images that were catalyst:  
 You see,  
 before Pierre Trudeau and his dancing feet  
 there was no Canadian unity, just Canadian confusion  
 This country as we know it was still basically a British colony,  
 with no nationalism of its own  
 It was a place that smacked of imperialism, residential schools, and assimilation  
 In those 1960s days  
 We got the Canada flag,  
 100 years of existence  
 French immersion schools  
 The Montreal Metro and its rounded bucket seats  
 The National Arts Centre and its octagons  
 And Expo '67  
 And *The Enchanted Owl*  
 And Inuit Art  
 It was an explosion of Canadian celebration,  
 A booming of Canadian togetherness  
 A time when people were allowed to express their love for land  
 and modern aesthetics  
*Qinnuajuaq* and her owls and birds burst into the international scene  
 When Canadians needed someone from the land,

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<sup>26</sup> *Qinnuajuaq* is the spelling for Kenojuak Ashevak that Inuktitut speakers use. Kenojuak Ashevak (1927–2013) was a prolific artist and one of the earliest innovators in James Houston's Kinngait (Cape Dorset) arts studio. Her works were displayed in the earliest print collections of the West Baffin Eskimo co-op. Ashevak is known for her graphic design work and experimentations in line and colour. Her piece *The Enchanted Owl* (1960) became one of the most iconic and recognizable images of Inuit art in Canada and was featured on a postage stamp in 1970 (Hudson et al. 37, Engelstad 37).

with Indigeneity to give a non-verbal Canadian identity. (30)

Arising from the incorporation of national visual culture during the 1960s, the 1970s and 1980s were a period when Inuit art began to be celebrated and promoted as a contemporary form of art. This epoch marked the beginnings of a change in the narratives about Inuit art and culture to become more critical of the impacts of colonization.

### **Inuit Art: A Celebration of National Heritage**

Although writings on Inuit were still dominated by southern perspectives, anthropologists such as Nelson Graburn began criticizing both the formation of the Inuit art market and the dealer-mentor position of art production that James Houston initiated. In his article “Ethnic and Tourists Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World” (1976), Graburn argues that Inuit society is a fourth-world population. He writes that Inuit are a sub-population residing in a first-world country whose standard of living aligns with that of a third-world country. Graburn writes, “The Fourth World is the collective name for all Aboriginal or native peoples whose lands fall within the national boundaries and techno-bureaucratic administrations of the countries of the first, second, and third worlds. As such, they are peoples who are usually in the minority and without power to direct the course of their collective lives” (1). He highlights the fact that Inuit art was largely commodified and produced by outsiders. Through his theories, he chastises art dealers as promoting “primitive art” as a western concept for

an uptight and self-important colonial market (2). He states that Inuit were no longer isolated, and that as a small-scale, non-industrial society, traditional art had ceased to exist, which is an extension of the erasure narrative. Graburn writes, “Eskimo aesthetic values, as expressed in the creation and criticism of modern soapstone sculptures, are a blend of traditional and introduced features. Though undoubtedly the art form started from souvenir models and the cheaper objects are still mere souvenirs, the bolder sculptures, even when made entirely for sale, are important to the Eskimos and have become integrated into their modern culture. Thus, they can be said to have risen above souvenir art and to have become works of a ‘commercial fine art’” (55). Here Graburn concludes that Inuit art is a result of change, a reaction of Inuit culture to colonialism as emerging identities, and a new, contemporary form of expression. He was the first academic to publicly recognize that although Inuit art had been encouraged by southerners, renowned artists like Kenojuak Ashevak, Jesse Oonark, and Pudlo Pudlat – as described by Bathory and Ipellie – were masters of great works in their own right and explored themes that express the fundamental qualities of Inuit culture and identity.

Just as Graburn marks a shift in the narrative on Inuit art, a shift is also seen in the content creation and innovation by artists. As Igloliorte states in her article “Inuit Artistic Expression as Cultural Resilience”,

In recent years, some artists have daringly stepped outside this framework to provide us with a number of divergent perspectives on the transformation of the North. These new artworks, uncommon and introspective, are a significant departure from the traditional imagery usually found in past decades, but I would argue that they serve similar ends: to strengthen from within a culture

threatened by dominant outside forces and to examine the way of life as Inuit know it. As the second and third generation of Inuit artists emerge, the possibility of remembering a traditional and unmediated lifestyle becomes less likely, and the artwork is shifting to reflect this reality. . . . This emergent socially conscious art is indicative of the increased ability of Inuit to reflect upon and respond to the multiple stressors of contemporary life. There has been a noticeable shift over the last two decades to a focus on daring, new intercultural or transcultural subject matter. (119–120)

As Igloliorte describes, a new generation of artists emerged during this time including Joe Talirunili, Pitseolak Ashoona, and Eli Sallualu Qinuajua, who began to explore their life experiences within the context of contemporary art and cultural change. There was significant investment in the sector by the federal government through the DIAND that included international touring exhibitions such as *Sculpture/Inuit* (1971) and *The Inuit Print* (1977). Large private collections began to be researched, documented, catalogued, and incorporated into expanding museum collections, most notably in the AGO, the National Gallery of Canada, and the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Specialized commercial and private galleries were established in major cities across the globe. Inuit artists began to be recognized through national accolades such as Companion of the Order of Canada<sup>27</sup> and Officer of the Order of Canada,<sup>28</sup> the highest civilian honours in the nation (Hessel I am an Artist 187–188, Lalonde 197).

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<sup>27</sup> Kenojuak Ashevak was inducted as Companion of the Order of Canada in 1982.

<sup>28</sup> Helen Kalvak and Jesse Oonark were inducted as Officers of the Order of Canada in 1978 and 1984, respectively.

## The Emergence of Inuit Voices in the Art Market

The end of the 1980s marked yet another shift in the presentation of Inuit art towards Inuit perspectives and self-representation, because 1986 was the inaugural year of the *Inuit Art Quarterly* (IAQ). At its inception there were few Canadian independent publications dedicated exclusively to Inuit art. The New York City-based publication *Arts and Culture of the North*, a newsletter for collectors in the US, produced 25 issues between 1976 and 1984. It focused on arts of both the American and Canadian Arctic. Similarly, *Inuit Art Enthusiast Newsletter* was the publication of a registered organization of Inuit art collectors located in Edmonton, Alberta. The group of 32 collectors produced a short newsletter on an *ad hoc*, irregular basis and ran 46 issues between 1979 and 1991. These publications focused on the interests of collectors; reported on upcoming books, exhibitions, and auctions; and were exclusively dedicated to carvings and prints (*Inuit Art Enthusiasts Newsletter* 1). *About Arts and Crafts* was published by DIAND as a resource for artists about the art world (covering exhibitions, collections, marketing, and reviews) that ran 13 editions<sup>29</sup> between 1977 and 1984 (Crandall *An Annotated Bibliography of Inuit Art* 96).

The IAQ is the only magazine still produced today that specializes in Inuit art and was created as a resource for both collectors and artists. It became the primary way the market at large engaged with new Inuit works. The IAQ began promoting Inuit

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<sup>29</sup> In 1983 *About Arts and Crafts* was renamed *Inuit Arts and Crafts* for its final two editions (Crandall *An Annotated Bibliography of Inuit Art* 96).

expressionism and individuality although, especially in the early years, the conversation was still dominated by southern arts administrators and historians looking to guide the market to specific works, artists, and communities they knew would sell. The focus of the magazine is on artist profiles, exhibition reviews, and trends in the sector.

According to the IAQ website, “The IAQ’s impact has been substantial: academic courses on Inuit art have been structured around the IAQ as a core text; profiled artists have been approached for exhibitions and commissions after publication; and both artists and galleries report that sales increase based on the content on the magazine” (Inuit Art Foundation). A year later in 1987, the Inuit Art Foundation (IAF) was formed.

The IAF, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting the Inuit art market, was established around the success of the magazine and came to fruition during the closure of the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council (Hessel *I am an Artist* 188). In contrast with the work of the Council, the IAF was specifically founded to prevent the DIAND from interfering in the production of artistic works, encourage Inuit across the Arctic in artistic endeavours (not just focusing on Houston’s or the DIAND’s preferred communities), remove political and budgetary limitations placed on artists through support from the public sector, and include Inuit art in contemporary mainstream Canadian art (*Inuit Art Foundation Implementation Plan* 3–4). The IAF’s two main objectives are as follows:

1. Initiate activities in the field to foster the production of art such as retaining arts advisors to act as animateurs, and devising ways and means of helping artists to obtain raw materials.
2. Act as a liaison/facilitator between Inuit artists and existing agencies and programs for artists, in recognition that language and geography are barriers

preventing Inuit from establishing linkages with the southern art community. (Inuit Art Foundation Implementation Plan 15).

As Marybelle Mitchell recounts in the *Inuit Art Foundation Implementation Plan*, artists across the Arctic were exasperated by the production restrictions placed on them by La Guilde, the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council, and other southern institutions such as galleries. Inuit artists wanted to understand how the art market functioned. Mitchell writes,

Among other things, artists are frustrated by the logistics of obtaining materials and a lack of understanding of the southern art network. For their part, dealers and distribution agencies complain of insufficient promotion and an inability to obtain high quality work. The fear is that, without intervention, Inuit art will be regulated to a lower-priced souvenir/handicraft market and that, even at this level it will not be competitive because of the higher cost of production. This is not a new fear but, until recently, Inuit Cooperatives, which have historically been responsible for the development of work in the arts of Inuit, have been able to ward off a disastrous decline in production and sales. Finding it increasingly burdensome to mount and monitor the projects required, the Cooperatives have now turned to the Territorial and Federal Governments for assistance, both of which have expressed the desirability of having one, arm's length institution through which promotion and development money for Inuit artists can be channeled. (l)

The IAF became the new marketing agency for the Inuit art market, ran educational programs in arts management, and granted funding opportunities to artists. Later, in 1987, the IAQ released its first artist interview in English, a legacy which has continued and is now available online alongside articles in Inuktitut. According to the art historian and curator Christine Lalonde, the increase in research and writing during the late 1980s and into the 1990s brought attention to individual artists creating works expressing personal experiences. Major solo exhibitions such as *Kenojuak* (1981) and



*Pudlo: Thirty Years of Drawing* (1990) elevated individual Inuit artists to the level of mainstream Canadian artists. Lalonde writes, “Undeniably, the solo exhibition is part and parcel of the modernist dictum of “artists as genius” (a notion not necessarily shared by Inuit) and was adopted to legitimize the status of Inuit artists as artists” (*Status 2000: Presenting Contemporary Inuit Art in the Gallery Setting* 197). Lalonde also notes that although the works of individual artists were being exhibited and shown during this time, the art historical approach in the gallery emphasized and contextualized the work within the narrative of myths, legends, and traditions instead of the artists’ lived experiences. Although this framework was more inclusive of the contemporary lives of artists than that of previous years, Inuit were still not representing themselves.

The introduction of the internet to mainstream Canadian society in the mid-1990s initiated yet another change in the narrative on Inuit art and culture. During this time Indigenous voices speaking about the impacts of colonization, the problematic incorporation of the arts of Native Peoples into Canadian cultural differentiation, and new decolonizing art historical and academic methodologies surfaced through the works of Gerald Vizenor, Grace Dillon, Margaret Kovach, Linda Tuhaiwai Smith, Mini Aodla Freeman, and Alootook Ipellie, among others. As curator Shannon Bagg indicates in the article “The Anthropology of Inuit Art: A Problem for Art Historians”, stemming from the writings in publications such as the *Inuit Art Quarterly* as well as the ability to conduct remote interviews more easily, authors were relying more heavily on interviews with artists when writing about and researching works. Bagg writes, “Responding to a heightened awareness toward the (mis)representation of other

cultures by the West, art historians began to present the 'Inuit' point of view in their analyses of Inuit art in a concerted effort to avoid imposing Western (or, more specifically, Euro-Canadian) assumptions about the nature of art onto the work of Inuit artists. For the most part, the approach has been championed as an effective strategy: Inuit are given a voice and with it, the power to influence how Inuit art is received" (184). Much of the impetus for change came from museums and galleries realizing the problematic narratives surrounding Indigenous arts and artists, as well as more Indigenous voices being amplified through the use of the internet.

The influence of Inuit artists and leaders on cultural representation was also reflected on websites that focused on self-representation and decolonization of Arctic communities. One such site entitled *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* is an informational web space built in 2006 as part of a multi-country exhibition attempting to write a comprehensive history of Nordic colonization of Arctic Peoples. This project brought together 56 artists, politicians, theorists, and activists from Iceland, Greenland, and Finland to pull the colonial history of the Nordic region back into mainstream consciousness and discussion. The project culminated in a DVD of visual essays, four traveling exhibitions, and a digital repository<sup>30</sup> of writings, artistic works, and press materials. *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* represented a shift in the narrative about Indigenous arts as a tool for advocacy and awareness. It was the beginning of digital-

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<sup>30</sup> See <http://www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org/files/index.htm>.

based content by Arctic artists from Indigenous perspectives made to document their experiences for a wide, international audience (*Rethinking Nordic Colonialism*).

Another example of cultural representation through the internet is the interactive website *The Nanisiniq Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (IQ Adventure), which was built through a partnership with Nunavummiut Elders, the Government of Nunavut, and Acadia University. The user engages in role-playing scenarios presented through short videos where they have to use the principles of IQ to make decisions and fulfil responsibilities. When a challenge is completed, the user is rewarded with a stone. When all the challenges are completed, the user has constructed a complete Inuksuk. The five immersion scenarios in IQ Adventure are environmental stewardship, justice, consensus-based decision making, learning by doing, and sustainable community (*The Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Adventure*). As Cynthia Alexander, one of the lead coordinators on the project states,

The website illustrates the power of new media technologies to counter the one-way information flows to the North that reinforced colonial systems, from judicial to health to education, which have negatively impacted Inuit well-being. . . . The digital design was itself an experience in decolonization, by sharing Inuit Elders' recollections of their cultural legacies, and creating through the co-development of scenarios in the interactive film, alternative visions of how to face contemporary challenges by drawing on the wisdom of an ancient culture . . . digital designs provide a vehicle for Indigenous peoples' struggles to decolonize, with the goal of inspiring and empowering youth and future generations. (Alexander *Igloos to iPods* 80, 88–89)

*The Nanisiniq Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* utilizes IQ as the foundation of knowledge and a source of power for future generations confronting the challenges of colonialism. It is

an example of Elders and artists reclaiming and continuing cultural legacies through new media technologies, which can also be seen in the more recent Inuit futurisms movement.

Through stronger avenues of self-representation and the engagement of Inuit artists, decolonization has been at the forefront of the discussion of Inuit art since the late 2000s. In 2010, the AGO published *Inuit Modern*, which reflects on Inuit representation in the public sphere, discusses several themes of colonization practices and southern commodification of Inuit art, and challenges its symbol of national identity from both southern arts administrative and Inuit points of view. This was one of the first publications exclusively dedicated to modern Inuit art, removing the works from the narrative created in the 1950s and 1960s. The publication was released in anticipation of the *Inuit Modern: The Samuel and Esther Sarick Collection* exhibition and symposium. Samuel and Esther Sarick were collectors of Inuit art who amassed a large collection of works from the beginnings of the market through the contemporary period and donated this collection to the AGO. The symposium was broadcast online and brought leading artists including Kenojuak Ashevak, Mattiussi Iyaituk, Jimmy Manning, David Ruben Piqtoukun, Mike Massie, and Tim Pitsiulak together to discuss inspiration, process, and the challenges in achieving their respective artistic visions. *Inuit Modern* documents Inuit art as storytelling, creating markers in a narrative of communities confronting change. Not only is Inuit art a reflection of the past, but it also brings into play the conflicting reality of present life. Through this conflict, Inuit are regaining the autonomy lost through colonization by asserting their rights, self-

determination, and custodianship over their culture and reimagining the future through the IF movement.

### **Inuit-Led Movements Within the Market: Inuit Futurisms and Decolonization**

Over the last six years, IF has emerged in the Inuit art world in different ways. In 2012, Igloliorte led a curation team in the exhibition *Decolonize Me/Decolonisez-moi* to imagine ways of restructuring colonial ties through Indigenous historical narrative and contemporary expression. This project confronts colonization through decolonizing curatorial practices and immersive multimedia experiences that reframe Indigenous histories by uplifting the voices of Indigenous artists. Igloliorte argues that the severance of colonialism is essential to Indigenous societal quests for self-determination. She writes, “[Indigenous artists] reflect contemporary Aboriginal lived realities and mobilizes Indigenous aesthetics and methodologies through their engagement with and honoring of those traditions and ancestors whose memories have endured despite centuries of aggressive colonial practices that sought to eradicate indigenous culture, knowledge, language, and bodies” (21). Igloliorte, along with numerous Indigenous activists and theorists, has ushered in the IF movement by featuring alterNative realities embedded in a decolonized world.

Projects on decolonization and IF are particularly important for future generations. As Inuk artist Barry Pottle describes in his article “*Kingullet Kinguvatsait: The Next Generation*”,

Today our young artists are taking advantage of social media, which offers

access to people, places and events that can provide opportunities for them to engage with other artists, to reach out to mentors, to earn media recognition, and to find alternative venues for exhibitions, affordable materials, and new methods. Such opportunities both enlighten these artists and allow them to further develop their skills and knowledge. Our young artists also travel or go to art school to seek out new training and techniques. In turn they have spaces, ideas, and opportunities that speak not only to the individual artists but also to the community overall. Community is still very important to this generation of artists; they value community, they value input, and they value our history, culture, and practices.

We want to see our art become visible — to be bought, sold, exhibited, curated, and shared — and it is through the new generation of artists that we can accomplish this. We rely on our young artists to continue to promote our art and culture, push boundaries, and produce creative work that sparks the collective consciousness and carries our traditions forward without compromise. It makes me so happy to see this generation of young artists keeping the fire within us lit.  
(137)

Eradicating the damage caused by southern colonization and assimilation practices is not possible; however, institutions can place a new focus on assisting Inuit artists through a sustained support system of openness and sharing of native-based perspectives and narratives that honour the past while recognizing the adaptive movements and innovative practices of communities confronting adversity and change. This can be seen in more recent exhibitions such as the 2018 *Tunirrusiangit: Kenojuak Ashevak and Tim Pitsiulak* exhibition held at the AGO. *Tunirrusiangit* joins the works of two powerful Inuit artists whose careers pushed the boundaries placed on Inuit art through meticulous practice and remarkable expression of the Inuit worldview. What is special about this exhibition is that it brought together four Inuit artists – Koomuatuk Curley, Taqralik Partridge, Jocelyn Piirainen and Laakkuluk Williamson

Bathory – to curate the show, which opened with a communal fresh seal meal harvested from Kinngait in the Walker Court of the AGO. As curator Jocelyn Piirainen writes in the *Tunirrusiangit: Kenojuak Ashevak and Tim Pitsiulak* catalogue, “For an urban Inuk who has been living in the south and rarely sees the tundra, this project took on even more meaning. It meant exploring my roots and connecting the old traditions with new conversation and discourse. Our team of co-curators began to look closely at the work of Kenojuak and Tim. We came to the collective realization: these two artists were encouraging us to think about and reflect on ourselves, our pasts, and our futures ...” (21). Empowering Inuit artists to gain sovereignty and control of history, creation, and market value will no doubt evolve through the digital age, but the most important question is how this can be achieved with the limited access to technological resources that exists in Nunavut today. As long as restricted northern access remains, online publications will continue to be developed for southerners who not only control the language of programming but will also remain the dominant perspective by default.

The marketing narrative of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created and promoted by southern institutions was anchored by a paternalistic idea that Inuit were on the brink of becoming extinct and that investing in their art would save a piece of Canadian heritage. As demonstrated in the *Massey Report*, the narrative of non-Native Canadians needing to rescue Indigenous cultures from eradication through the advancement of industrial capitalism is one of the main threads of post-war Canadian cultural policy that endures today. Inuit visual art and its global market continue to reconstruct this narrative of erasure given their development as a colonial post-war project. With the emergence of Inuit curators and academics since 2000, however, this

same cultural production is being reclaimed as a repository of cultural heritage. Igloliorte asserts, “it is through our arts that [Indigenous artists] demonstrate the inconvertible continuity of Indigenous cultures, ability to survive and thrive despite centuries of colonization, oppression, and imperialism, and by the dynamic engagement with and presentation of Indigenous arts and cultural practices that we contradict colonial narratives of the eminent disappearance or inevitable assimilation” (*Decolonize Me / Decolonisez-moi* 21). One of the problems with the southern-controlled market framework is that it produced a one-sided, colonial narrative constructed for and disseminated in the south.

While 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists and academics were relentlessly documenting the life of Inuit from a southern worldview, prominent art historians and cultural entrepreneurs such as James Houston were writing about art as a representation of mysticism within a simple, primitive culture. As Joshua Stribbell, President of the National Urban Inuit Youth Council, recently posted, “it is important to recognize that we not only carry the spirit of our ancestors with us, that we also carry a perception of Inuit that was created to entertain the imagination of the west, and has come to challenge our own sense of identity. As many of us, particularly those of us in the south, try to strengthen our relationship with other Inuit, we must move past this image that has dominated the contemporary minds idea of who Inuit are” (2018). Southern promotion of the myth of Inuit primitivism has deeply challenged Inuit identity and, for long time, made it nearly impossible for artists experimenting in new methods or mediums to show or sell their works, stunting the growth of the market.



The next chapter explores the colonial valuation of the Inuit art market in Nunavut and analyzes the mechanisms of understanding how the arts economy functions within larger economies and frameworks. Much like the intentions of the *Massey Report*, Inuit communities are seeking to establish sovereignty and self-determination through strong, unified leadership based on a shared culture shaped by an Inuit worldview. Inuit in Nunavut have come to measure community health culturally in accordance with IQ, which, long before the formation of Nunavut in 1999, became a unified system of beliefs, skills, principles, values, and knowledge that have been acquired through the experiences of elders and transferred from generation to generation. *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* is a constantly developing holistic Inuit worldview considered to be a living technology that prepares Inuit for success in the future (*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Education Framework*, Tagalik 2). As Igloliorte argues, the principles of IQ are embedded in Inuit art, because it provides intergenerational knowledge transference through visual documentation and narratives. Visual art also records skills “passed from generation to generation, and on the creativity that is a natural part of Inuit culture” (Sanaugait 4). In spite of the inherent importance of art for Inuit cultural health and wellbeing, the Inuit art market continues to run on the antiquated, colonial, third-party distribution system introduced to the territory in the 1950s by southern institutions. The Inuit art market was created at that time as a mechanism to transition Inuit communities from a nomadic sharing-based economy to a capitalist, wage-based economy (Sanaugait 9). The frameworks, policies, and methodologies used to determine the value of Inuit art are all colonialist and, for the most part, ignore IQ.

Today, after nearly 70 years of being controlled by southern Canada, the market has ceased to grow.

## CHAPTER 6: NUNAVUT'S VISUAL ARTS ECONOMY

The 1950s saw the rise of a national and international Inuit arts industry in Canada. According to the 2017 *Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy* report, the most current and only Canadian pan-Arctic Inuit arts economic analysis<sup>31</sup>, Inuit cultural economy contributes \$64 million to the Canadian gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>32</sup> The economic activity attributable to Inuit arts created or sustained over 2,100 full-time equivalent jobs in Canada (7). This is a considerable contribution from one of the youngest art sectors in the country; moreover, these artists continue to distinguish the nation on the global stage. Nunavut currently holds the highest number of producing artists in Inuit *Nunangat* and generates about 58%, or over \$37 million, of the total sectoral economic impact (*Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy*). This seemingly high earning potential of the art market raises questions, including “Why do Nunavummiut artists who are engaged in the Inuit futurisms movement or are interested in new media technologies need to travel south to create works?” and “If the arts market in Nunavut is so lucrative, why not bring new technologies to Nunavut?” Although Indigenous Nunavummiut continuously produce stunning works that captivate audiences worldwide, on average each artist earns less than \$9,000 per year from his/her art (*Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy*). This is not enough revenue per artist to drive economic stimulation or

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<sup>31</sup> Big River Analytics defines the *Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy* report as an economic impact analysis under the scope of the project heading (21).

<sup>32</sup> Gross domestic product is defined as the measured value of the health of an economy (Fioramonti 4).

inspire competition in other markets, such as ICT. Despite nearly 70 years of southern commercialization of Inuit art, millions of dollars in sales, and the importance of Inuit contributions to Canadian national identity, Nunavummiut artists continue to struggle with significant socioeconomic issues.

According to a report published by the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.<sup>33</sup> (NTI), “Poverty is a situation that exists today in Nunavut when people cannot access the supports they need to maintain their connection to the land or to participate fully in the wage-based economy” (*The Makimaniq Plan 2 8*). The territory has among the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the country, as well as the highest suicide rate (Statistics Canada, Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency, Nunavut Poverty Progress Profile, Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention). Poverty has a wide-ranging scope that includes levels of income, employment, housing, education, healthcare, food security, and cultural expression. Nunavut faces challenges in every aspect of poverty.

Not only is there a disparity between the economic indicators of Nunavummiut versus southern Canadians, but there is also a huge gap between those of non-Inuit and Inuit within the territory. For example, there is a virtual 0% unemployment rate for the approximate 5,000 non-Inuit living in Nunavut. Meanwhile, 22.5% of Inuit are unemployed (*The Makimaniq Plan 2 8*). According to Statistics Canada, families in

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<sup>33</sup> Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated is the Inuit-led organization that coordinates and manages Inuit responsibilities outlined in the Nunavut Agreement and ensures that the federal and territorial governments fulfill their obligations (About Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.).

Nunavut earn about 19% less than families in southern Canada (Median Total Income). On average, non-Inuit reportedly earn approximately 23% more than Inuit in the territory (Peritz). The Department of Finance reports that the top 10% of earners account for over 34% of the total income in Nunavut (Ducharme). In addition, food, housing, and transportation costs can be triple those of similar goods and services offered in the Canadian provinces (Understanding Poverty 10). On-going poverty – especially food insecurity – compounds the reality of the Arctic's rapid colonization that left many communities emotionally, economically, and physically strained. With an understanding of the socioeconomic challenges in Nunavut, including the high cost of living, it is easy to see how difficult it can be for artists to invest in the products, spaces, and technologies required to create new works.

This chapter analyzes the declining Inuit arts economy in Nunavut as a result of sustained colonial practice that does not incorporate the principles of IQ or the Inuit worldview in the measurement of the value of the sector. The decline in Nunavut's arts and crafts market, caused by a lack of sectoral innovation, has been noted in analytic reports since 2010. The four avenues of arts distribution in Nunavut are wholesale, regional retail, southern retail, and direct-from-artist sales. Direct-from-artist sales are the only source of distribution that has seen growth due to social media networking. Unfortunately, the high costs of shipping coupled with unreliable and expensive internet connections restrict expansion in this area. However, the growth in direct sales implies that sectoral development can be achieved by shifting to a community-first, IQ-based model supported by a strong internet infrastructure that places communities at the centre of decision making.

## **Colonial Nuances of the Economic Impact Study**

To understand the declining Inuit art market it is important to unravel the mechanisms and nuances of an economic impact study, which is a report conducted by analysts that determines market value and potential. These studies are imperfect calculations with many fluctuating factors. Despite the lack of standardization among analysts, economic impact studies influence policies that determine funding and investments. The funding of the arts is cyclical in nature, because the earning potential of the market influences the annual government funding allotment for all Nunavummiut and thus determines resources and support for artists, who in turn produce art.

To break down this process, it is important to understand how economists situate and apply parameters to the analysis of cultural economy. The economics of art or ‘cultural economics’ is a distinct sub-discipline of economics, and as such, economists apply certain rules or characteristics to determine its value. Due to the diversity of the art sector, there is not a singular accepted analytical methodology for determining its economic impact, which is a challenge when reviewing reports on Nunavut’s cultural economy.

### **Characteristics of the Cultural Economy**

To help guide economists, this sub-discipline is defined by three characteristics or “streams” that ground the analytics. The first characteristic is that the economics of art

are based on public goods and services that are experiential (Barone 26). This means that art is a tangible product produced by a person where the more it is experienced, the higher the value is. The theory is that art needs to be experienced to be appreciated, so the more art that is in the public domain, the greater the demand.

The next characteristic of cultural economy surrounds public support of the arts and the policies that influence it. A prosperous and robust arts sector is contingent on strong public support. According to the economist Arnaldo Barone, this phenomenon of the arts economy stems from market failure: "... market failure is generally considered a situation whereby, left to its own devices, the market delivers an outcome that is less than Pareto-optimal.<sup>34</sup> With the market failing to deliver an optimal outcome, intervention and subvention might be justified" (57). Since public support is an expected element of the arts sector, economists analyze funding structures and the political climate to determine the amounts of public funding required to produce the most efficient and effective results (Barone 26).

The final characteristic of cultural economy is that it suffers from an economic theory known as Baumol's Disease,<sup>35</sup> also known as 'Cost Disease'. In the 1960s economists William Baumol and William Bowen were researching a theory to explain

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<sup>34</sup> Pareto-optimal, named after economist and political scientist Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), is a socially ideal state of neoclassical economics that implies that in a perfectly competitive market, resources cannot be redistributed to improve the financial circumstances of one person without financially hurting at least one other person. A Pareto-optimal market implies the ultimate efficiency in resource allocation regardless of equality or fairness (SOAS University of London, Pareto Efficiency).

<sup>35</sup> Term coined by economists William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen in 1966.

why the costs for consumers to participate in labour-intensive industries, such as healthcare, education, and the arts, rise over time while the methods of production in those areas stay the same (Barone, Baumol, Baumol and Bowen, T. Lee, and Worstall). In their book *Performing Arts – The Economic Dilemma*, Baumol and Bowen used the example of the performing arts to explain the problem of the cost disease – it takes musicians the same amount of time to play a piece in 1965 as it did in 1865, yet tickets to see the performance cost more in 1965. The economists conclude that all industries must respond to the rate of inflation in the overall economy. In this example, in order for arts organizations to retain the best musicians, the musicians must earn a relatively competitive wage in the economy of the time period they are working. This issue arises when technological innovations allow technology-based firms to create products for less money and raise wages to keep competitive workers. In labour-intensive industries organizations must pay more for fixed labour requirements over time.

In the article “Symphony Orchestra Economics: The Fundamental Challenge”, Baumol states, “The ‘cost disease’ is named after its symptom. Any economic activity affected by it will tend to rise in cost persistently and at a rate faster than the economy’s rate of inflation, obviously leading to financial pressures for anyone who supplies the product” (52–53). Baumol claims that labour-intensive firms costs can rise faster than the rate of inflation because productivity innovation in technology-based industries results in less time to produce products each year, while in labour-intensive industries wages rise incrementally without any offset to reduce labour. Where Baumol and Bowen use this theory to predict overall economic trends, Barone looks at the cost disease from the perspective of arts organizations. Barone concludes that the cost



disease leads to an earnings gap. This occurs when rising costs to produce work is met with a level or decreasing profit over time (Barone 26). The cost disease resulting in an earnings gap can be seen in entrepreneurial artists as well. For example, Inuit sculptors living in Nunavut typically hunt or scout for raw materials to create works. It takes time to find, extract, and transport carving stone and to find or hunt whale bones, horns, antlers, or tusks. Pieces are created by hand using saws, files, axes, hammers, chisels, and small power tools. Once a design is formed, the piece is polished with waterproof sandpaper, emery cloth, steel wool, or liquid polish over many hours, or even days (Soapstone to Inuit Art). Creating a sculpture is a long process, this process has remained relatively the same over generations. When this is compared to an artist who designs a piece on a computer and then prints on a 3D printer, as seen in Inuit futurisms, the amount of labour required to produce work declines. The problem occurs when both works are valued equally. The artist using digital technology earns more per hour than the artist who must spend time searching for and working with organic materials. As Barone states, “[The arts] operate in the economy as a whole and as such must compete with other firms for the resources used in production. Thus, without the productivity benefits experienced by other firms, their costs will increase relative to costs in other industries” (Barone 26). Although the consumer cost of art rises with inflation, the costs to produce art also rise, as Baumol states, creating financial tensions for those who supply the product on the market. The cost disease is a factor that is inherent in the economics of the arts and is considered in all financial analyses.

Another factor of arts sectoral valuation is that analysts approach cultural economies from a neoclassical economic perspective that is regulated by two theories: scarcity and individualism. These theories are applied to the entire market – both consumers and producers. First, resources are scarce and people must compete for them. This is true of artists competing for raw materials or funding and of consumers who have to buy quickly when a favoured piece is up for sale. Second, the art market is analyzed through a lens of individual reductivism. Elements of individual reductivism include the following:

1. The economy of the whole can be understood by examining the actions of individuals;
  2. Individuals will act according to their preferences;
  3. Individuals are motivated by self-interests and will respond to incentives; and
  4. Changes in actions are caused by a shift in constraints, not shifts in preference; and this approach assumes that preferences are shared across individuals.
- (Barone 26–27)

These principles help economists to see market trends as a whole, evaluate past fluctuations, and make predictions for the future. This methodology is the opposite of the principles of IQ in that it places the individual, rather than the community as a whole, at the centre. Furthermore, it does not account for social values such as community health and wellbeing or the continuity of heritage. When discussing the value and earning potential of the Inuit art market in Nunavut, it is critical to consider the history of the market as well as the greater economic picture to determine where the arts sector fits in. As previously discussed, the history of colonialism and its continued impacts on communities are important factors in this analysis. Not only is

the art market founded upon Euro-Canadian systems of distribution, but its value is also analyzed through colonialist ideals and theories. These methodologies often clash with the principles of IQ and have multi-layered effects on communities. As Maskegon-Iskwew writes,

Indigenous successes in navigating corporate culture have led to important gains in economic development and social self-esteem, but also to the rise of an imported class system and an internationalization of corporate ethics and value systems. The imposition of business management culture on Aboriginal society (and now its self-generating adoption) presents the main barrier to an inclusive, mutually beneficial, and culturally distinct flow of ideas and approaches between the contemporary indigenous arts and cultural theory communities, and those of Indigenous politics and corporate administration. As a result of incorporating (or being colonized by) non-Indigenous business management theory, much of the non-Indigenous business management perceptions of creativity and innovation (and by extension art) have also taken hold in Indigenous representation organizations and leadership. (*Drumbeats to Drumbytes: Globalizing Networked Aboriginal Art* 205)

Whether working within or outside of the contemporary market, Inuit artists are participating in a non-Indigenous economy, which influences innovation and leadership. As arts administrator John Zarobell writes, “What is troubling is the impulse to measure art’s value in strictly economic terms and thereby to quantify its contribution to society. Cultural production may be thoroughly implicated in the market system, indeed the global economy, but it has long been perceived to represent an alternative to that system” (4). While art does play many critical alternative roles in communities other than that of economic stimulator, it is the monetary value of the sector that determines the support and resources artists receive from the government.

This is determined by measuring the economic contribution of the arts and crafts sector to the territorial GDP.

## The Importance of the GDP

Gross domestic product is represented as a single number, usually calculated every three months, that indicates the rate of economic growth or decline within a government's borders. It measures the value of goods and services as well as prices of production output to determine the health of an economy (Fioramonti 4). Gross domestic product forms the Western understanding of economic progress through the value of all goods and services produced within a specific time period. This reductive number tends to favour industrial production and undervalues the economies that provide supplemental income, such as the arts economy (Fioramonti 9). All governments aim to have positive GDP growth, and it is often discussed as the only solution to an economic crisis. According to German economist and social scientist Philipp Lepenies, "Gross domestic product is the most powerful statistical figure in human history ... GDP is not only calculated on behalf of the government; it also feeds back into government actions. It enables governing by numbers" (1). Simply put, the lower the GDP, the less is spent on culture. As economist Lorenzo Fioramonti writes, "GDP has come to represent a model of society, thereby influencing not only economic but also political and cultural processes. GDP drives macroeconomic governmental policies and sets priorities in the social fields. . . . Moral principles such as equity, social justice, and redistribution that are subjected to GDP calculations are only taken

up by policy makers if they comply with the GDP-led development model” (9). Gross domestic product is typically referred to as a national measure of growth, however, it is also calculated by region.

According to the World Bank, in 2016 Canada had the 10<sup>th</sup> largest GDP globally (Gross Domestic Product 2016). Although Nunavut is the physically largest landmass in Canada, it contributes the least to the national GDP compared to the other provinces and territories. In 2016, Nunavut contributed 12% of the national GDP, making it the lowest contributing governmental body in the country (Gross Domestic Product, Expenditure-Based, by Province and Territory). According to the Nunavut Bureau of Statistics, the biggest contributors to the Nunavut GDP are metal ore mining, public administration, quarrying, oil and gas extraction, and construction. In 2016, the arts and crafts industry contributed 0.09% of the total GDP in Nunavut (Nunavut Real GDP by Industry, 2011 to 2016). Nevertheless, the federal government promotes the cultural importance of the arts sector, as seen in the 2016 *Backgrounder on Territorial Formula Financing* report, “Nunavut’s arts sector and cultural industries cannot be overlooked when assessing the economic outlook for the Territory. Its contribution to the measured production of Nunavut is barely noticeable beside the billions of dollars spent in mining, construction, and government operations. However, its real contribution is very important from the standpoint of culture and economic diversification” (83). From the GDP perspective, the arts economy in Nunavut is one of the lowest producing sectors in the smallest economy in Canada, which determines annual funding allotments.

The formula of the GDP is consumption + investments + government spending + exports – imports. As Fioramonti states, “GDP may be represented as a cross-section at any stage in the circulation of economic goods – production, distribution or consumption – with results that, if no statistical difficulties are met, should be identical” (Fioramonti 4). Although the calculation of GDP is seemingly straightforward, there are three approaches used to determine its value:

1. The expenditures approach, also known as the spending approach, is the sum of all spending on and export of final products minus imports within a sector to determine market value. This is the most popular method of calculating GDP due to relatively easily available accounting records of industry expenditures.
2. The income approach is the sum of all money earned by components of a sector within a timeframe. This approach accounts for income earned from all aspects of the production process including wages, rent, interest, and profits. This approach is typically utilized to determine the purchasing power of households.
3. The value-added approach (also known as the production approach) is the most difficult approach. It is the sum of the value of all products made in an industry, plus the value of new goods and services minus the cost of the secondary products used to create the final industry product. This approach requires narrow surveys of businesses, which can be slow and costly. It is used in attempting to dissect the income within a specific industry and analyze the makeup of outputs. (Fioramonti 7, Coyle, Segal)

The data obtained via the income approach is said to be the most accurate due to the reporting of wages, rent, interest, and profits of both private and public institutions, which are required to report to the government via tax statements. The value-added approach would be the most accurate, but it requires the most work on the economists' part to find and extrapolate data. The expenditures approach is the most popular because it calculates output through easily accessible expenditure reports.

The approach selected for analysis depends on what the government is most interested in visualizing and what the analytical firm is trying to prove. These approaches follow the same overarching GDP formula and should theoretically produce the same final number. However, due to differences in methodologies, data collection, and sources, these approaches almost never result in the same values (Coyle). Governments obtain the information they need to assess the value of an economy in terms of its contribution to GDP through pursuing an economic impact analysis (EIA) or economic impact study (EIS), most often conducted through independent companies. These reports are tools used to evaluate a sector to determine if strategic development goals are being met. This process is usually undertaken in response to a shift of investment, change in tax regulation, or adoption of a new policy (Chisholm 5). They measure three components of economy: direct, indirect, and induced. The difference between an EIA and an EIS is that an EIA will likely include possible expected inputs from alternative or explorable economic opportunities (Cordato).

The direct economic impact measures the transactions between consumer and producer. In the art market, this is how much money artists earned for work before removing the expenses incurred in making the product. The indirect component measures the income and employment generated in other sectors by producers spending money on items required to create the products in the original sector. For example, when a carver purchases equipment at a hardware store, the store earns income from the artists and hires employees to complete the transaction. Finally, the induced component is the spending of income generated from the sector into the local

economy. This includes any spending by artists as well as any member of a tangential sector in the local economy, which includes expenses such as rent, utilities, and groceries. The induced component yields the largest sums because it includes the broadest possible data (Chisholm 9, Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy 8, Manitoba 1).

### Challenges in the Economic Impact Studies of the Inuit Art Market

There are a few challenges to the EIA and EIS. First, the report is based on estimations. Occasionally, firms do not have the data they need to complete an assessment of a sector. In the case of missing data, economists have a toolkit of assumptions that can be applied to estimate the value of a component. Analysts use their best judgement to factor in increased gains<sup>36</sup> (known as multipliers),<sup>37</sup> estimate incremental income, and estimate incremental net gains<sup>38</sup> in an area of high unemployment (Chisholm 5–6). An economic impact report is a nuanced process that can be influenced by the individuals conducting the analysis. For example, in the 2010

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<sup>36</sup> A gain is defined as an increase in the value of an asset that occurs when the selling price is higher than the original cost of purchase or acquisition (Kagan).

<sup>37</sup> Multipliers are economic factors that, when changed, cause increases in many other related economic variables. This term is usually used in reference to GDP or total regional income; it causes gains in total output to be greater than the change in spending that caused it (Kenton).

<sup>38</sup> Incremental revenue is calculated by establishing a baseline revenue from sales and measuring the increase of sales that occur after that point. Similarly, incremental net gains are the overall increase in the value of an asset (or market) measured after a baseline point has been calculated and can be used to indicate market growth (Bragg, Kagan).



Nordicity Group *Economic Impact Study: Nunavut Arts and Crafts*, the analysts did not have enough data to calculate the indirect or induced components. However, they wanted to incorporate these numbers in the final report to define the reach of the arts economy in the territorial GDP. The firm combined the indirect and induced components into one “spin-off” analysis. Although they did not have the data to compile this, they arrived at their calculations through the addition of multipliers, estimations from national numbers, and economic comparisons to remote communities outside of Nunavut (Nordicity Group 23). Nordicity states, “Statistics Canada provincial input-output tables were used to generate estimates of the indirect economic impact. . . . Multipliers were used to estimate the induced economic impact” (20). The firm did not have the data they needed to accurately complete their analysis, so the analysts used their best judgement to find alternative data that told the story they wanted to tell.

In an EIA or EIS, the direct component is always calculated; however, if the indirect or induced components are too difficult to calculate, they will be removed from the report (Chisholm 10). Alternatively, if economists are attempting to prove growth or economic reach, components can be added, which raises the total amount of sectoral impact on the GDP. These fluctuations make it extremely difficult to compare reports. The 2017 *Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy* report was the first analysis to include a detailed breakdown of the indirect and induced components generated by artists who make work for personal consumption and not to sell in the market. Big River states, “In our analysis there are five instead of the usual three components included in the calculations of the spin-off impact from two different artist populations. These populations are distinguished by whether they produce arts and crafts for income or for

consumption by themselves, for their families, or for use in their community” (41). The analysis in the report can be misleading due to these complexities.

The 2017 report concluded that the total economic contribution of the arts and crafts sector in Nunavut to the national GDP was \$37,301,423; however, the direct component (artists’ income before expenses) was only \$20,462,631, which is a 45% difference. Therefore, while measuring the GDP is important for funding and calculating growth, a high GDP contribution does not necessarily mean that artists are generating high income. This is the difference between what artists take home and what they contribute to the GDP as a whole. This calculation can be misleading to artists or administrators who do not have experience analyzing the GDP, how it is calculated, and how it influences policy.

### **Economic Impact Studies of the Inuit Art Market: A Comparative Approach**

The Government of Nunavut and the federal government sponsored three reports in 2010, 2014, and 2017 to measure the sectoral economy after the 2007 adoption of a cultural policy entitled *Sanaugait: A Strategy for Growth in Nunavut’s Arts and Crafts Sector*. This policy document supports the expansion and increasing diversity of the art market in Nunavut and outlines a seven-year framework for economic growth. *Sanaugait* is the most recent economic strategy for the arts sector in the territory and is relied upon today (May 2019). The policies were developed in collaboration with artists, arts organizations, departments within the territorial and federal governments, Inuit

organizations, co-ops, and stakeholders in the private sector. It represents the wants and needs of the arts and crafts community.

*Sanaugait* states that Nunavut artists contribute heavily to the global art market, with Inuit art accounting for 10% of the Canadian international art export market (5). According to this report, in 2007 the arts sector engaged 4,000 Nunavummiut – approximately 20% of the workforce over the age of 14 – who relied on the sector as a source of primary or supplemental income. The report estimates that the economic impact of the arts sector contributes \$30 million to Nunavut’s economy annually (5). The report pushes an aggressive agenda to “increase the value of Nunavut’s arts sector through investments that improve quality, stimulate innovation, and support sustainability, in partnership with Nunavut artists, their organizations, and their communities” (6). This was to be accomplished through seven main goals:

1. Increase the quality of Nunavut art;
2. Maximize artists’ profits through participation in the value-added chain;
3. Secure market share through protection of intellectual property rights;
4. Secure market share through international brand recognition;
5. Expand international market shares;
6. Provide current and accurate information about the arts sector; and
7. Promote and celebrate the contribution of Nunavut’s arts to global society. (7–8)

The framework of *Sanaugait* was meant to invigorate the market and was the catalyst for the economic analysis that followed. The three reports that measure the economic impact of the arts sector in Nunavut after this point are the *Economic Impact Study: Nunavut Arts and Crafts* (2010), *Review of Sanaugait: A Strategy for Growth in Nunavut’s Arts and Crafts Sector* (2014), and the most comprehensive and recent

analysis, the *Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy* (2017). However, each of these reports measures the market in different ways due to lack of data and different approaches to the analytics.

The first report to measure the economic health of the arts and crafts sector in Nunavut after the adoption of *Sanaugait* was the *Economic Impact Study: Nunavut Arts and Crafts*, which was published in June 2010 by the Nordicity Group and Uqsiq Communications. In 2009, the Nordicity Group reported that the visual arts sector, composed of 3,000 artists,<sup>39</sup> contributed \$33.4 million to the territorial GDP, created 1,068 full-time equivalent jobs, and generated a direct impact of \$27.8 million<sup>40</sup> for artists (5). In terms of earning distribution, Nordicity Group estimated that 84.5% of artists earned \$10,000 or less while 8% earned above an average of \$45,000 annually (8). The *Economic Impact Study: Nunavut Arts and Crafts* provided the first detailed analysis of each distribution channel for the sector in Nunavut. The EIS broke the sales

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<sup>39</sup> The Nordicity Group reached this estimate by amalgamating consultation feedback from artists, co-ops, retailers, wholesalers and available online data (*Economic Impact Study* 8). This estimate is 1,000 people less than what was estimated in the 2007 *Sanaugait* document (*Sanaugait* 9, *Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy* 68).

<sup>40</sup> The 2010 *Economic Impact Study: Nunavut Arts and Crafts* contains multiple sums for the direct impact calculation. In the executive summary on page 5, second paragraph, Nordicity Group claims, “It is estimated that roughly 3000 Nunavut residents earn some income annually from arts sales. These arts sales, which generate in total more than \$27 million in direct payments to artists, eventually resulting in more than \$50 million in end consumer sales, with more than \$30 million generated through retailers” (5). On the same page, paragraph 6, under the economic impact subheading, Nordicity Group reported a second direct impact of \$22.9 million, a figure that represents sales minus expenses. The difference of \$4.1 million. The report uses the \$27.8 million figure in its tabular calculations and Big River Analytics also calculates direct impact before expenses, so I selected this as the comparative figure.

distribution into two distinct flows, sales made by artists (direct impact) and total consumer sales. First the art was sold by the artist directly to consumers (\$13.3 million or 47.8%), to Nunavut retail outlets (\$4.9 million or 17.6%) or to wholesale distribution (\$9.6 million or 34.5%). These sales generated \$27.8 million to artists. From this point the Nordicity Group calculated the end consumer sales that included artist selling directly to consumers (\$13.3 million or 25.5%), Nunavut retailers to consumers (\$6.8 million or 13.1%), and wholesale sales via southern retail outlets (\$32 million or 61.4%). End consumer sales totalled \$52.1 million (26). Interestingly, Nordicity Group found that an estimated 38% of arts and crafts were sold to consumers in Nunavut, and 65% of the in-territory spending happened in Iqaluit and Baffin Region. In 2009, Nunavut residents spent approximately \$11.5 million purchasing works directly from artists and about \$3.5 million at Nunavut retail stores. The wholesale market was at this time controlled by four main groups: Canadian Arctic Producers (CAP), Dorset Fine Arts<sup>41</sup> (DFA), Inuit Art Marketing Service, and the Nunavut Development Cooperation. These businesses purchase works directly from artists with cash in hand and then sell the works in the southern and international markets. In 2009, wholesalers spent \$9.6 million purchasing work and earned \$16 million in sales, a 66.6% markup (9).

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<sup>41</sup> Canadian Arctic Producers and Dorset Fine Arts are both subsidiaries of the Arctic Co-operatives System. Dorset Fine Arts is the marketing division of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative. Due to the historical significance of James Houston's work and notoriety and earning power of the community of Kinngait (Cape Dorset), in 1977 DFA was granted autonomy from the co-op system in the management and earnings from artists that produce in Kinngait (Mitchell 246).

Although the analytical firm acknowledged the limited comparative financial data between 2007 and 2010, data they collected through various surveys of Nunavut artists and arts professionals suggests that market growth had stalled (10). A “stalled” economy is defined as the end of growth. It is experienced in a sector when a sluggish rate of growth over a period of time is followed by a weakened economic performance. A stall may or may not be followed by an economic decline (Ho 1). According to a study conducted by the *Harvard Business Review*, a common misconception about economic stalls is that they are caused by forces external to the market. However, the study found the opposite to be true: “In fact most stalls occur for reasons that are both knowable and addressable at the time. . . . the vast majority of stall factors result from a choice about strategy or organizational design” (Olson). The study found that nearly 50% of all economic stalls are caused by one of four factors: premium-position captivity, innovation management breakdown, premature core abandonment, and talent bench shortfall (Olson). It is likely that the stall in the Inuit art market in Nunavut was caused by aspects of each of these categories.

Premium-position captivity is the most common cause of an economic stall. It is defined as the inability of a sector to respond to “new, low-cost competitive challenges or to a significant shift in customer valuation of product features” (Olson). This occurs when a once successful sector or business does not appropriately or meaningfully respond to market changes. In terms of Inuit art, the market was incredibly strong in the 1950s and 1960s but did not shift business models and was slow to adopt new technologies and therefore could no longer compete with other areas of the national visual arts market.

The second most common cause is innovation management breakdown, which occurs when the management of internal business processes do not update or create new products or services. The third factor, premature core abandonment, is the failure of the managers of a market to take advantage of growth opportunities within the core customers, products, and distribution channels. Finally, the fourth factor, talent bench shortfall, is essentially a lack of business leadership with the experience, skills, or knowledge required to execute effective market strategy (Olson). As previously discussed, due to the colonial history of the market as well as the lack of administrative innovation, it is likely that internal factors led to the stall of the Inuit art market in Nunavut.

In the 2010 EIS, the Nordicity Group blamed the Inuit art market stall on the 2008 financial crisis as well as on artists being too isolated and unable to reach new markets (10, 55). The report concludes that due to the arts sector's value as a national and international marketing tool for Nunavut, the arts should receive a boost in public funding. It also called for stronger partnerships between arts and non-arts organizations: "Although many current support programs are artist-based (i.e. need to be assessed by artists), other development that involve artists are led by non-artists should be explored" (77). Instead of investigating systems of innovation, the economists at Nordicity Group suggested that external factors led to the end of market growth and that the best course of action was to double down on the failing market structure that led to the economic stall in the first place.

The economic climate worsened, as reported in the 2014 report *Review of Sanaugait: A Strategy for Growth in Nunavut's Arts and Crafts Sector* published by

Nordicity and Uqsiq Communications Inc. The goals of this report differ from that of the 2010 EIS. In the *Economic Impact Study: Nunavut Arts and Crafts*, the mandate was to provide a complete analysis of the sector as well as to make recommendations for maximizing sectoral impact. The goals of the 2014 report focused on analyzing the value of the sector towards the overall growth of the territorial economy and the cost effectiveness of the annual program contributions (Nordicity 1). In this comprehensive review of the *Sanaugait* policy, Nordicity found that in the seven-year period since its adoption, the arts sector was in a steep decline and had not significantly contributed to the growth of the territorial economy. Nordicity reports that between 2010 and 2013 the sector experienced a 9% decline in total economic impact from \$33.4 million (2009) to \$30.3 million (2013),<sup>42</sup> and total full-time equivalent jobs dropped 20.4% from 1,068 (2009) to 850 (2013). In the period being analyzed there was also a 34% decline in the wholesale market, as well as reduced contribution from retailers (2).<sup>43</sup> Nordicity does not report fluctuations in direct impact but does note a 9% increase from \$13.3 million (2009) to \$14.4 million (2013) in direct-to-consumer sales driven by the introduction of sell/swap groups on Facebook and an increase in trade shows (2).

The decline in the economic impact of the sector was first attributed to a global downturn in art and antique sales. Nordicity and Uqsiq report, “In 2013, global sales of

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<sup>42</sup> In the 2017 *Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy* report, Big River Analytics notes that Nordicity did not account for inflation. When this statistic is adjusted for 2013 inflation the decline is larger, measured at 13% (81).

<sup>43</sup> While the report does not provide an in-depth analysis of the retail market, it notes that the decline was attributed to a 46% loss in sales at Jessie Oonark Ltd. (located at Qamani'tuaq [Baker Lake]), a significant retailer in the territory (Nordicity 2).



art and antiques approached the pre-crisis high, partly due to a 25% jump in US art sales, yet Inuit art sales have reportedly not bounced back in this key market” (2). As a secondary cause, Nordicity highlights differences between baby boomers’ and millennials’ buying and investment habits, noting a shift in the core business of the sector. The study states,

Inuit art collectors are often over 60 years of age. As buyers downsize their homes and collections, more work becomes available in the secondary market. The increased supply has reportedly contributed to a decline in auction prices, which may impact prices in the primary market. Younger collectors are reportedly buying more contemporary art and drawings, rather than carvings and wall hangings, and are less likely to collect from any one particular market. (Nordicity 2)

Again, Nordicity looked to external factors harming the economy rather than critically analyzing the structure of the market. Furthermore, the analysts calculated that between 2009 and 2012 the arts and crafts sector was slated to receive \$2.4 million in public funding. Only 78% of this funding was distributed throughout the sector due to the outreach, subscription, and capacity challenges of arts organizations (3). This means that Nunavut arts organizations did not meet the qualifications to receive full funding from the government, and the remaining money was clawed back rather than invested in the market.

Additionally, Nordicity could not complete the cost effectiveness analysis because the Department of Economic Development and Transportation Canada (ED&T) did not appropriately track funding. The study states,

The return on investment (ROI) of grants and programs was not tracked in an aggregate manner by ED&T, Community Operations, which administers the ADP

grant program. High staff turnover at ED&T also affects data availability and the timely processing of grants. With files remaining open, applicants face future eligibility issues. Furthermore, CH does not evaluate funding on a sub-sector basis and its programs do not map well to *Sanaugait* goals. (3)

When the Nordicity Group called for an increase in public funding in 2010, it did not consider whether the government itself had the administrative capacity to carry out the programs. This oversight has led to years of fiduciary mismanagement and a lack of data that might have helped the arts sector grow.

The most recent and comprehensive analysis is the 2017 *Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy* produced by Big River Analytics. The focus of this report was to analyze the entire Inuit arts market across Canada. The report provides an in-depth analysis of each region. The methodology and approach differ significantly from the first two analyses. As mentioned above, this report includes the indirect and induced components generated by artists who make work for personal consumption rather than to sell in the market. This is an important addition to the analysis, because although these artists do not collect income, they still contribute to the GDP by purchasing products used in the creation of art.

Big River Analytics estimated the total contribution of Nunavut's arts and crafts sector in 2015 at \$37.3 million. When compared to the \$30.3 million (2013) figure, one would assume growth; however, this is not the case. There is evidence that the market has continued to decline. Big River Analytics included more financial components in their analysis than their predecessors; therefore, the total contribution included more inputs and thus the final calculations were larger. The only data that could be

compared between reports were the figures for artists producing income. When compared, these figures show a decline of 9% between 2013 and 2015 (82). In terms of the distribution chain, Big River Analytics found that there was a 23% drop in the wholesale channel due to the closure of Inuit Art Marketing Services<sup>44</sup> (83). Although its inventory was absorbed by CAP, sales did not rise. The Nunavut retail market fell slightly, reporting a \$37,348 loss. Interestingly, direct-to-consumer sales rose 1.5% due to increased social media sales, mainly in Iqaluit.<sup>45</sup> “Nunavut is host to the largest Facebook group dedicated to the sale of Inuit arts and crafts, and the materials, tools, and inputs used in the production in Inuit arts and crafts. Iqaluit Auction Bids (IAB) has members all across Canada, but artists are primarily in Iqaluit” (87). However, this sales method is time consuming and expensive for artists, because they must make arrangements for shipping and payment (87).

Big River Analytics estimated that there were 2,370 artists<sup>46</sup> producing art for income in Nunavut in 2016. The firm noted the significant discrepancy between the 2014 and 2017 reports: “There is also a major difference between the total number of artists (7,650) and those producing arts and crafts for income (2,370), a distinction that was not made in previous work” (69). If the generated direct impact income

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<sup>44</sup> Inuit Art Marketing Services (IAMS) was founded in 1981 by HBC as a distribution centre and showroom in Toronto, Ontario. In 1987 it was taken over by a group of investors that formed the holding company The North West Company (HBC’s Interest in the Inuit Art Market).

<sup>45</sup> Iqaluit has the highest broadband speed in Nunavut.

<sup>46</sup> Big River Analytics conducted independent arts surveys and relied on data from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, which is how they arrived at a higher number of working artists than the Nordicity 2014 report.

(\$20,462,631) were distributed equally to working-for-profit artists, it would amount to only \$8,634.02 per artist per year (70). However, the income is not evenly distributed, as Big River reports: “The skewed income distribution is consistent with a large number of artists making relatively small incomes as a full-time endeavour. Further evidence for this can be seen in the percentages of artists in low art income ranges compared to the percentage in high art income ranges” (Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy 13). This means that there are some artists who earn more than others, because famous artists make the majority of the income and emerging artists tend to struggle economically.

Additionally, Big River estimated that Inuit participating in the arts economy earn 26% less than those who do not sell creative works. This means that the majority of Nunavummiut actually lose money by working in the arts due to the cost of production. Approximately 34% of artists earn less than \$1,000 per year, and approximately 76% of artists earn less than \$10,000 per year (Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy 73). This issue is magnified by Baumol’s Disease, as little to no innovation in arts production has created an earnings gap. As is seen in other areas of the industry, over time the production costs rise as sales price diminishes in relation. Due to the high labour and time allocation of creating a piece of work artists, earn an average of \$13.45 per hour. According to Big River, “A significant number of Inuit artists earn \$10 or less per hour” when creating art works (72). Minimum wage in Nunavut is \$13.00.

There are significant problems in Nunavut’s arts economy. Artists are not only earning limited income, but most are losing money by participating in the arts. Although economists have been noting the decline for over 10 years, very little has

changed in the market infrastructure. The systems that are failing are not going to be fixed by public funding but by innovations in strategy, distribution, and methods. These innovations can only be achieved by decolonizing the market; shifting to a community-first, Inuit-created model that supports artistic movements such as Inuit futurisms; and ensuring that artists have access to the resources they need to experiment with new media.

### **Inuit Futurisms and New Media: The Case for Digital Transformation**

Although it is difficult to compare economic impact reports because of shifts in analytical approaches and methodologies, it is clear that the arts economy in Nunavut has not experienced the growth anticipated from the adoption of *Sanaugait*. As the *Harvard Business Review* suggests, the majority of artists are not receiving significant revenues from the art market because there has not been innovative disruption in the business model since its beginnings in the 1950s. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), 60% of the global GDP will be digitized by 2022. The process of making businesses and markets digitally driven is known as “digital transformation” and it is the catalyst for changing relationships between consumers, businesses, and governments (Our Shared Digital Future 5). Digital transformation is a holistic adoption of digital technology at the core of operations of a company or market. This process does not simply focus on making existing customers happy with technologically updated products and services but challenges the market to employ advanced

technologies to capture internal data to make strategic investments and decisions

(World Economic Forum, Wang 163). As analyst Ray Wang writes,

Going digital doesn't mean a wholesale replacement of existing technologies. It doesn't mean just putting up a mobile front or adding social collaboration feature to a process. The convergence of mobile, social, cloud, analytics, big data, and communications is just one starting point. Adding sensors to old machinery provides data in context. Mobilizing mainframe data for use in analytics delivers new experiences and provides insight into new opportunities. Bringing external data to internal systems creates new patterns that provide better data for testing out new business models. . . . It's not about just adding one technology to change how things are working. . . . it's about moving to data driven decisions. (Wang 157, 163)

The Global Center for Digital Business Transformation predicts that the arts, media, and entertainment industry will experience one of the most “rapid and constant” changes in business practices due to digitization. They state that the arts industry is headed towards a nearly total competition of digitized firms by 2020 (Bradley et al. 6). Not only does this lead to new strategies and competition, but to new valuations of products and services as consumers are drawn to convenient distribution, innovation, and organizations they can directly engage with and share (Goodwin 105). By positioning Nunavut at the leading edge of ICT development and supporting the arts and crafts industry in undertaking digital transformation, Indigenous Nunavummiut artists will have more opportunities to leverage digital tools to create works and networks, organize for collective action, and engage in global interactions with new markets.

In 1997, professor of business administration at Harvard Business School Clayton Christensen coined the term ‘disruptive innovation’. In his text *The Innovator's Dilemma*, Christensen differentiates between sustaining and disruptive technologies. A

sustaining technology is an advancement that supports the established values of mainstream customers and improves the performance of already existing products and services. An example of this in Nunavut's art market is the introduction of email contacts and gallery websites, which largely replaced paper catalogues and streamlined ordering. These technologies enable the market to be run more efficiently while replicating old management models. Alternatively, disruptive technologies tend to appeal to a new customer base and essentially change the market by offering customers new value in services, products, or features; an example is the introduction of smartphones after cellphones. While disruptive technologies do not tend to have lucrative results at first, they are investments in long-term strategies that grow and expand as they prepare markets for the consumers of the future (C. Christensen xix).

Analyst James McQuivey pushes these theories further with the concept of 'digital disruption', a phenomenon that occurs when digital technologies offer consumers new value in services, products, or features; for example, the introduction of Facebook or Twitter. Although, as McQuivey illustrates, digital disruption is not limited to applications and platforms, it can be applied to internal processes such as partnership governance, pricing, and distribution, among others. Digital disruption is where Inuit futurisms and works in new media offer launching points for growth. As Mohawk multimedia artist and co-creator of AbTeC Skawennati suggests,

I started imagining ourselves in the future because I believe that the medium is a big part of the message. I decided to use new media to do it. I like to lump all this new media stuff: software, apps, websites, videogames, virtual world, machinima, into one word, cyberspace. I use cyberspace as a medium because I believe it is a metaphor for the future. . . . I like to think that by adding images of successful native people to our collective mind's eye that we can reverse the tragic statistics and start to see our people thriving. . . . What is next for us to

consider on a societal level is the idea of thriving. . . . Who do we want to be in the future? What as individuals, nations and cultures, do we have to give to society? What technologies do we want to develop? (*TEDxMontrealWomen*)

Artists working in IF imagine and can bring to fruition the technologies and platforms of tomorrow, disrupting the market of today.

In order to have digital disruption, the market requires digital transformation so that it can support artists working in new media through ICT implementation and enticing new markets. Digital transformation will also allow the community to respond to the most common internal causes of market stalls (premium-position captivity, innovation management breakdown, premature core abandonment, and talent bench shortfall) as suggested by the *Harvard Business Review* study (Olson). It is innovation introduced to the core of the market that will give the Inuit arts community the ability to respond to new, low-cost competitive challenges; update and create new internal management processes; take advantage of online growth opportunities and distribution channels; and execute effective market strategies. As the executive vice president and head of innovation at Zenith Media, Tom Goodwin, states,

Guts are required to understand that disruption isn't about superficial changes; it's about rebuilding the entity that will revolutionize what your current company does. It's not about managed decline or reducing costs to meet profit goals. It's about a leap of faith, investment in the future of what your business needs to be. It's a process best described as 'self-disruption' – undertaking the bold changes needed at a core level, to best prepare yourself for a new future. The goal of self-disruption is to become the entity that eats your own company's future, rather than having someone else do it. (Goodwin 13)



Digital transformation allows the community to introduce innovation at the heart of the market, which in turn supports the development of new technologies that will address the future demands of the market.

Although change has been incredibly slow, administrative innovation is being implemented in a few areas. Notably, the Igloo Tag program, an initiative that stems from the colonial history of the art market, is being innovated by the IAF, ostensibly in the interest of the Inuit arts community as a whole. The Igloo Tag, a trademarking system used by administrators to authenticate Inuit art, is now owned and controlled by the arm's-length art organization for the first time in its history. Although the program must overcome significant challenges in regulation and administration, the new era of the tag demonstrates the marriage of economics, technology, art, and self-determination in the sector. The transfer to the IAF represents a possible mechanism of market control via brand name recognition and authority over intellectual property rights of arts and crafts, both tangible and digital.

## THE IGLOO TAG: A CASE STUDY

The Igloo Tag is a registered trademark under which a printed signet is issued by an authorized<sup>47</sup> art wholesaler or dealer to certify an associated creative work as crafted by an Inuk artist. The tag was created by the Canadian federal government in tandem with HBC to combat fraudulent, mass-produced, sculptural reproductions that began to appear in the Canadian market during the late 1950s (Boyd, *The Canadian Eskimo Art and Design Trade-Mark*). Today, the Igloo Tag continues to act as an indicator of Inuit authenticity and remains influential for sales. According to a survey published through the 2017 *Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy*, Big River Analytics asked consumers, “On average, what price would you be willing to pay to have an Igloo Tag included [on a piece of art on sale in a gallery]?” (70). Consumers responded they would pay a price between \$88.67 and \$145.79 per piece (73). Based on this survey, Big River estimated that the Igloo Tag holds an implied annual aggregate value of just over \$3.5 million.<sup>48</sup>

After almost 60 years of government ownership, management of the Igloo Tag was officially transferred to the IAF on March 9, 2017 (Boyd 81). Although the transfer of the

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<sup>47</sup> The IAF is the current Igloo Tag trademark holder and thus issues licenses. From 1959 to 2017 the Igloo Tag was controlled by the Canadian federal government.

<sup>48</sup> The implied value of the Igloo Tag is not the actual value added to pieces from association with an Igloo Tag. To arrive at this figure, Big River reported in 2017 that there were six licensees issuing approximately 30,000 Igloo Tags annually. The analysts multiplied 30,000 by the average consumer-perceived value of \$117.26 to conclude that the Igloo Tag has an implied annual aggregate value of just over \$3.5 million (73).

tag could be a significant step forward for the self-representation of the Inuit art community, given that the IAF is southern-based and is the sole support organization for all Inuit artists in Canada, the foundation faces challenges in the scope, regulation, and innovation of the Igloo Tag. The initial challenges surround the cost and logistics of trademark enforcement. The federal government maintained strict control over the use of the mark from the time it was formally registered in 1959<sup>49</sup> until 1984 when the department overseeing the program was dissolved (The Canadian Eskimo Art and Design Trade-Mark 5). From 1984 to 2017 the trademark was unattended by the government and instead managed by licensees based on the honour system (The Canadian Eskimo Art and Design Trade-Mark 6, Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP 8). Consequently, the IAF now has to regulate and dispute a considerable number of misused, unlicensed, and fake tags being placed on authentic and fraudulent art works nationally and internationally. Moving forward, trademark enforcement will be a critical piece of the IAF's ability to properly manage the tag. If unlicensed use continues to be allowed, the strength of the trademark will be diluted by fraudulent works, resulting in the potential loss of the trademark rights as well as the loss of sales and profits for Inuit artists, according to executive director of the IAF Alysa Procida (Interview with Alysa Procida).

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<sup>49</sup> The Igloo Tag was formally registered as a certification mark on February 20, 1959, although it is noted in the official record that the trademark was used in Canada at least as early as September 5, 1958 (Canadian Eskimo Art & Design Trademark Registration 1959).

The second major issue surrounds the artistic scope of media that is included under the trademark. The Igloo Tag was originally created to protect Inuit sculpture. Until 2017, the Government of Canada officially recognized limited forms of visual art production as “authentically” Inuit. According to the 1991 trademark details, only “carvings made by Inuit of Canada, principally in stone and ivory, but also in wood, bone and antlers; also dolls, wall hangings, wool tapestries, parkas, mittens, duffle socks, baskets, sealskin and caribou skin boots and *ayyagak* games made by Inuit of Canada, in various materials” were covered under the Igloo Tag (Canadian Eskimo Art & Design Trademark Registration 1991 2). As described in *Sanaugait: A Strategy for Growth in Nunavut’s Arts and Crafts Sector*, the visual arts sector in Nunavut has historically encompassed both arts and crafts: “The Inuktitut word *sanaugaq*, meaning ‘things made by hand,’ is used to represent the entire range of arts and crafts made in Nunavut, with no distinction between ‘arts’ and ‘crafts’” (9). The market therefore includes a wide range of mediums including painting, printmaking, jewellery (beading, metal, and organic material), new media (animation, virtual reality, augmented reality, digital design, web design, and game design), curatorial work, drawing, textile work (seal skin, duffle, fabric, and beadwork), sculpture and carving (bone, stone, and wood), bronze casting, instillation (film, projection, and sculptural), photography (analogue and digital), collage, ceramics, and woven baskets (Inuit Artists Database). The list of mediums included under the umbrella of Inuit visual art is ever growing, because artists are constantly investigating new practices. The incorporation of new mediums into the trademark status by the IAF represents a step forward for the growth of the market.

The IAF is currently exploring how incorporating new media into the purview of the Igloo Tag could be beneficial to communities and to Inuit artists working in all disciplines and locations within Canada through community consultations (Consultation Summaries). To date, there have been seven consultations across Newfoundland and Labrador (Postville and Makkovik), the Northwest Territories (Inuvik), Nunavut (Iqaluit), and Ontario (Ottawa). The consultations invited market stakeholders including artists, government officials, representatives of arts associations, gallery owners, and distributors to weigh in on the future of the tag. The summaries of the consultations were subsequently published on the IAF site. Although feedback is valuable, there is recorded pushback from galleries questioning the innovation of the tag:

The IAF asked the group how they felt about expanding the trademark's use to more media, ranging from the visual arts to performance. A gallery owner asked why the Igloo Tag Trademark would need to be expanded to other media, since film and music are far more difficult to recreate fraudulently, compared to the resin cast-moulded 'carvings,' the Igloo Tag Trademark was originally created to protect against. The counterpoint was raised that other types of contemporary Inuit art also need to be protected against not only inauthentic works but that works by Inuit also need to be held above works by other people when depicting Inuit. The room agreed that how the trademark will be applied to these intangible art forms will have to be determined in the rest of the consultations. (Consultation Summaries)

It is clear from the trajectory of the market towards new media that the Igloo Tag will need technological innovation to be useful to artists working in digital arts or wanting to market their works online, despite the feedback or concerns of administrators. For artists working in the Inuit futurisms framework, this could be another device through

which a future of control and self-determination is possible. An example of this innovation is an Igloo Tag trademark that links to a personal website or profile on the Inuit Artist Database (run by the IAF), similar to Ruben Komangapik's QR project, where authenticity can be related to the consumer directly through the artist's voice. In this way, the artists can track where their works are going and their market reach, represent themselves, and participate in valuation. In the hands of the Inuit arts community, the Igloo Tag opens up new possibilities for decolonization. However, in order for the new trademark system to be successful, the program must surpass its colonial history as a mechanism of government control over Inuit art production and market development, as well as the enduring romance of the "primitive" as authentic. Although the Igloo Tag has the potential to inspire market growth via brand recognition and technical innovation, while it was in the control of the government it was unsuccessful in deterring the sale of imitation Inuit art.

## **History**

The incredible popularity and money generated from Inuit art in the 1950s caused a surge of mass-produced, fraudulent Inuit art known as fakelore throughout the southern Canadian market. Fakelore, a term coined in 1950 by American author and folklorist Richard M. Dorson, is defined as a label for false goods positioned in the market as folk art (*Is Folklore a Discipline?* 199). Dorson argues that folk, handcrafted works have a legacy of value and "since the subject matter so lends itself to dilution, distortion, sentimentalizing, and commercializing, and further since any bystander may

pose as an authority on a topic apparently in the public domain”, standardization of valuations need to be developed in the corresponding markets (199, 201). In regard to Inuit sculpture, fake works were easier and cheaper for retailers to obtain and could sell for as much as original works, returning a large profit. Furthermore, there was not an established regulating body to differentiate between fake and authentic pieces. As art historian and curator Melanie Scott writes,

Fake Inuit art began filtering its way into the marketplace from numerous channels. . . . Objects made of resin compounds that attempted to mimic the style of Inuit art were sold as hand-carved Inuit soap-stone sculpture. . . . The market in ‘fakelore’ detracted from the benefits that the Inuit community should have realized from the sale of works of art. . . . Tourist shops dotting the Canadian landscape from downtown shopping centres to airports offer a plethora of poor copies of Inuit creations. . . . In purely mathematical terms, roughly three per cent of the retail outlets of this bustling centre are passing off fakes or imitation Inuit art as the genuine thing. (*Inuit Art Quarterly* 12.2 18)

In an effort to curtail fakelore sales, the Igloo Tag was introduced by DIAND and HBC in the late 1950s as a mechanism to authenticate 3D works produced by Inuit in the Canadian Arctic. The Igloo Tag was registered as a certification mark entitled “Canadian Eskimo Art & Design Certification Mark” with the Canadian Intellectual Property Office on February 20, 1959. A certification mark is a type of trademark. An ordinary trademark is a logo or visual element registered with or by the federal government that is used to distinguish a product, service, or organization from its competitors. Similarly, a certification mark is a logo or visual element registered with or by the federal government usually associated with an industry that guarantees a certain level of quality of the product. Licenses may be granted to people or companies by the

certification mark holder for the purpose of demonstrating to consumers that the product meets a set standard. The holders of trademarks, including the certification mark, have the exclusive right to use the mark for 15 years and can renew every 15 years after in perpetuity. Failure to renew results in the mark being expunged from the federal database and, although an unregistered mark can still be used, if a dispute arises it may be difficult to prove legal ownership and stop infringement (The Canadian Eskimo Art and Design Trade-Mark, A Guide to Trademarks). As such, the Igloo Tag was not administered or controlled by artists themselves but licensed by DIAND to dealers and wholesalers to affix to 3D works that met a certain criterion. In order to be eligible for an Igloo Tag, the work had to be “Carvings made by Eskimos of Canada, principally in stone and ivory, but also in wood, bone, and antlers” (Canadian Eskimo Art & Design Trademark Registration 1959). In the 1960s, DIAND authorized the following 10 organizations to attach and tag pieces of work for distribution:

1. La Guilde;
2. La Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau-Québec;
3. HBC;
4. Arctic Co-operatives Limited/CAP;
5. West Baffin Eskimo Co-Operative;
6. Coppermine Cooperative;
7. Government of Canada (DIAND Development);
8. Government of the Northwest Territories;
9. Central d’Artisanat du Québec; and
10. Canadian Arctic Cooperative Federation Ltd.

These assigned numbers were printed on the bottom-right corner of each tag to indicate which supplier distributed the work. The work was then either sold directly to consumers or, more often, sold to retailers for resale. Each tag included information



about the work such as the name of the artist, community where the work was made, year crafted, description or title of the piece, and internal item number for the records of the distributor.



Figure 6.1. Inuit Art Foundation. *Igloo Tag issued by the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (La Guilde).*

The early distribution licensee agreements appear to have been based on verbal arrangements with DIAND (Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP). At that time, the Igloo Tags were regulated by the chief of the Social Development Division of DIAND's Northern Program, Gunther Abrahamson, who heavily monitored the use of the tag to protect the quality and longevity of the Inuit art market (The Canadian Eskimo Art and Design Trade-Mark). Abrahamson frequently checked in with licensees about how they were using the tag, kept a list of artists producing works, and maintained a list of authorized retailers. Although DIAND was managing the tag, they wanted to maintain an arm's

length of distance from production.<sup>50</sup> In a 1961 letter addressed to HBC and La Guilde, R.A.J. Phillips, Assistant Director of the Northern Administrative Branch of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, defines the position of the government:

In connection with Eskimo carving, the main role of the Department has been to assist, by promotion of various means, in building a strong and continuing market. We have also used what influence we have in a joint attempt to discourage mass production or the lowering of standards of carvings. . . . The long-term markets for Eskimo carvings, upon which so much of the Arctic economy now depends, cannot help being influenced by the selection of outlets and by the handling of carvings in the retail stores through which the public buys them. We are therefore anxious to continue to do all in our power to maintain the general quality of retail outlets and to strengthen the position of authorized sellers by such means as the promotion of the registration mark. (Phillips RG7/1/726)

Later in 1961, as the Inuit art market was expanding to international retailers, the Canadian government negotiated a reduced tariff trade agreement with the United States Customs Bureau for art works associated with an Igloo Tag (FitzGerald RG7/1/726). The original agreement only included a handful of wholesale Inuit art exporters such as HBC, La Guilde, and select Arctic cooperatives. However, in 1962 the program expanded to all exporters selling works associated with the trademark (Phillips RG7/1/727). The tag became a powerful mechanism of the international sale and export of Inuit art to the United States.

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<sup>50</sup> In 1961, DIAND (now INAC) founded the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council to manage the quality and type of art production in the Arctic (Hessel I am an Artist 188).

The licensed distributors of the Igloo Tag shifted fairly quickly. In 1965, the Canadian Arctic Cooperative Federation Ltd. (10) united with the CAP (4) to form one organization, although each branch retained its respective tag numbers. By the 1970s, the Coppermine Cooperative (6) and Central d'Artisanat du Québec (9) failed to renew their agreements with DIAND and were removed from the program.

In 1972, DIAND – in addition to its certification mark status – registered the Igloo Tag (under Canada Eskimo Art & Design) as an official mark (also known as a prohibited mark) that grants government authorities special protections on their visual branding. An official mark can only be held by a public authority or a federally sponsored organization, needs to be accountable to the public, and is not for commercial use. These special trademarks are presumed to cover all goods and services associated with the mark and as such are afforded broader rights than a regular trademark. Official marks do not need to be renewed, cannot be cancelled based on non-use, and are only removed from registration when they are voluntarily withdrawn (The Canadian Eskimo Art and Design Trade-Mark, Blank, Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP). This gave the Igloo Tag extraordinary protection under government regulation; however, there is no evidence to suggest that the government had ever enforced or pursued an infringement case under the official mark designation.

Soon after, DIAND also established formal, contractual agreements with the remaining seven authorized distributors: La Guilde (1), La Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau-Québec (2), HBC (later operating as the Northwest Company) (3), Arctic Co-operatives Limited/CAP/Canadian Arctic Cooperative Federation Ltd. (4/10), West Baffin Eskimo Co-Operative (5), the Government of Canada (DIAND Development) (6),

and the Government of the Northwest Territories (7). Under these agreements, the government consented to promote the mark as “authentic hand-made Eskimo carvings” nationally and internationally, provide updated lists of authorized licensees, and ensure duty-free exports to the United States. Licensees were required to promote the mark, adhere it to approved work, ensure it was promoted through retail outlets, provide a list of retailers to the government, and report any unauthorized use (Agreement Between Canada and the Igloo Tag Licensee 1972).

Government regulation continued in this way until 1984 when Gunther Abrahamson retired from DIAND and the Northern Program was dissolved, after which DIAND retained ownership of both the trademark and the official mark but did not regulate its use. Licensees began to regulate the Igloo Tag via the honour system (The Canadian Eskimo Art and Design Trade-Mark 6, Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP 8). This was a devastating blow to the integrity of the Igloo Tag, because licensees were quick to print their own tags and, in some cases, issue sub-licenses that caused even more confusion in the market. For example, Marybelle Mitchell, former executive director of the IAF, verbally negotiated with INAC (formerly DIAND) that the #2 FCNQ tags be allowed to print a blue “Sedna logo” on the front of their tags. The new design was approved by INAC, although the license agreement was never updated. Based on the precedent set by the #2 tag, the Government of Nunavut began placing Authentic Nunavut logo stickers on the #8 tags (*Igloo Tag Report* 3, 7). Furthermore, the Government of the Northwest Territories and later Nunavut formally and informally issued sub-licenses to multiple organizations. Most significantly, no one within the federal government performed audits of the inventory, although tags guaranteed to

consumers that the works were “Certified by the Government of Canada”. No certification was conducted aside from internal controls put in place by licensees (Interview with Alysa Procida).

In an effort to discontinue the program, on March 30, 1989 the certification mark expired and was expunged from failure to renew (Canadian Eskimo Art & Design Trademark Registration 1959, *The Igloo Tag Report* 1). In 1991, the Igloo Tag was officially registered by DIAND as a trademark, which offers less protections and benefits than a certification mark because it is only used to distinguish the goods or services of a person or organization from competitors (Canadian Eskimo Art & Design Trademark Registration 1991, *A Guide to Trademarks*).

### **Effectiveness of the Igloo Tag Program**

Even at its peak of regulation by the government, the Igloo Tag was ineffective in discouraging the mass production or maintaining the quality of retail outlets in the Inuit art market.<sup>51</sup> In the years leading up to the transfer of the Igloo Tag, there were three independent reviews of the trademark program: *The Canadian Eskimo Art and Design Trade-Mark (Igloo Tag): A Case Study* by the Indian and Inuit Art Centre and INAC in

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<sup>51</sup> The only publicly documented exception to this was the sale of Japanese imitation sculptures brought to the attention of HBC and the federal government in February 1959. The sale of the Japanese imitations had been organized and distributed by gallery owner Stephen Roland in Edmonton, Alberta. By November 1959, the Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources was able to identify the source of production and negotiated directly with the Japanese ministry to halt the import of the imitations (Phillips, et al. RG7/1/726).

2007, the *Igloo Tag Report* by INAC and ED&T in 2009, and the *Inuit Art Foundation Igloo Tag Program Legal Review* in 2014. Each of these reports sought to revive the Igloo Tag and frames the trademark as a successful but neglected program (*The Canadian Eskimo Art and Design Trade-Mark* 2, *Igloo Tag Report* 4, Osler 2, *Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy* 69). However, program reviews dating as far back as the 1960s claim the Igloo Tag was ineffective as a mechanism of protection for Inuit artists. As early as 1960 there was consumer confusion about the Igloo Tag, and many had questions about what could be included under its certification. In an effort to promote the tag, former Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs and National Research R.G. Robertson wrote in *The Commerce Journal*:

As an aid in maintaining the prestige market for genuine Arctic work — in economics jargon, to ‘decrease the elasticity of substitution’ — an identifying trademark was established. This mark serves to protect legitimate dealers and to help the ordinary customer who could not be expected to have an expert knowledge of the art. . . . The registration mark, therefore, does not certify that the piece to which it is attached is art. It merely says, in effect, that it was produced by a Canadian Eskimo in the Arctic in circumstances which give rise to the art. It says that it is not a product of mass production, that it is not a copy, that it is not an imitation. The symbol, with which many Canadians are familiar, is a simple igloo with the words ‘Canadian Eskimo Art’ surrounding it. (52)

As the program continued, sales of fakes increased in the market. This sparked an internal legislative review in 1967 entitled *Legal Protection of Indian and Eskimo Arts and Crafts in Canada*. In this report the government acknowledges that the Igloo Tag offered only limited protection to the sale of Inuit art in the face of mass production. The report states,

Under present Canadian law, Indian and Eskimo art objects and handicrafts may be protected to a rather narrow extent. Aside from all details and qualifications, the chief apparent weakness of the present legal situation seems to be that the manufacture and sale of imitations is perfectly legal, as long as there is no proof of any misrepresentations of their character as non-genuine. . . . as long as imitations and reproductions are on the market, some confusion between them and the genuine articles is bound to occur, and all measures to be taken can only limit its incidence and degree but not fully eliminate it. (Fatouros 47)

The report continues by defining whom the Igloo Tag protects: the consumer is protected against fraud and deceit; additionally, the tag helps Indigenous artists receive the financial benefit from the sale of an original work. The report asserts that if a consumer invests in a fake work, they likely would have purchased a certified piece. Furthermore, the tag protects the integrity of the market; if low-quality art is allowed, consumers may confuse the fake with the real. In legal terms, this is known as protection from the dilution or depreciation of the trademark. Despite these protections for both artists and consumers, the government concluded that there were many technical and policy-related problems that prohibited strong action against fraudulent works, including the view that prohibition would not be entirely effective and that consumers have the freedom of choice between products (Fatouros 80–85). Ultimately, the government argued that it is the responsibility of the public to research an object before purchasing. However, in the 1960s this was nearly impossible due to the remote locations of artists and the relative absence of ICT.

As the imitation market expanded, the manufacturers of mass productions would register their companies with Indigenous-sounding names such as Dimu, Wolf, Ross,

Siku (meaning Ice in Inuktitut), and Anana with corresponding slogans like “Images of the North” or “Original Stone Sculptures” accompanied by a “Made in Canada” stamp. These works were created from a mould, mass-produced, and held together with a binding agent. As the 1967 government report states, this practice was and continues to be legal. Companies can allude to being Inuit-owned but cannot directly state it. The result is ambiguity in the marketing of fake Inuit art. Despite consumer education campaigns on the Igloo Tag from both the government and wholesalers such as La Guilde and HBC, imitation art ran rampant in the market, as it does today.

In March 1983, ITK commissioned a report on the effectiveness of the Igloo Tag and the feasibility of increasing protections for artists. The report, *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art*, harshly criticized the Igloo Tag program as well as the lack of government action in stopping the sales of fake Inuit art:

Inuit art is an important symbol of Canada, and is being cheapened by the widespread marketing of fakes. . . . The producers of fakes sign with exotic Inuit-sounding names even when they are Europeans, and label their products ‘original’ even when these are reproductions. The only government response, to date, has been to promote the ‘Igloo Tag’ of authenticity on genuine works. This is like permitting margarine producers to call their product ‘butter’ and Consumer and Corporate Affairs responding with a ‘cow tag’ campaign. (Denhez 1)

Furthermore, ITK found that not only were imitations polluting the market, there were some galleries and industry experts who were going as far as to encourage the fake market as, in their opinion, Inuit artists could not meet the public demand:

Another expert argued, on the other hand, that such fake works may



paradoxically have a positive effect. According to this argument, cheap \$10 imitations can be compared to a form of advertising: they assure that the Inuit style is constantly on public display, and ‘tempt’ the public to buy not only the fakes, but the real thing. There may also be a ‘filtering-up process’: a person who was initially attracted to the buying of authentic item. If there were no cheap fakes to ‘introduce’ people to the Inuit style, this argument suggests that some people would never get around to acquiring a taste for Inuit art at all. (Denhez *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art* 5)

Inuit Tapirit Kanatami recommended both a short-term and a long-term strategy for fighting fraudulent art. In the short term, ITK requested that the government add an “Inuit-style Labelling” regulation to the National Trademark and True Labelling Act statute. The new regulation would require that imitation Inuit art manufactured as multiples must be labelled with the phrase “Imitation Inuit Art”. This part of the regulation was intended to act as an incentive for the producers of fake art to look towards Inuit artists for design inspiration for a singular work. In this way, the producer could avoid the “imitation” label and place the original artist in a position to negotiate copyright and royalty agreements. Additionally, in an effort to remove non-specific and confusing descriptions such as “Inuit-inspired”, ITK recommended that the new regulation prohibit the words “Inuit” and “Eskimo” from being used to label a work that was not designed or created by an Inuit artist. Phrasing that alludes that a work was hand carved or made in the Arctic could not be used unless the claims were substantiated. Furthermore, ITK recommended that the word “original” should be completely banned for mass-produced works and multiple productions. Finally, all works must include basic artist information similar to what is specified on the Igloo Tag, including the legal name of the artist, location where the work was produced, materials

used in the production of the work, and, when applicable, machine tools used to create the work (Denhez *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art* 34–35). Long-term recommendations included new legislation distinguishing between three kinds of Inuit-style art:

1. Authentic Inuit works, which are (of necessity) subject to copyright;
2. Imitation Inuit works, which are produced as individual originals; and
3. Inuit-style works which are produced in multiples.

Inuit-style works must be based on an authentic Inuit design; otherwise, they cannot be put on the market. (Denhez *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art* 36)

In a letter dated May 20, 1983 addressed to Marc Denhez, the lawyer who prepared the report on behalf of ITK, the federal government via Bruce Couchman, a representative from Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada, Bureau of Policy Coordination, directly rejected ITK's recommendations. Couchman states that the government can intervene only when there is a label to begin with. If an item does not have a label, legislation does not allow the government to require one. The government therefore cannot enforce artistic disclosure if there is no label, and furthermore, the government cannot intervene if the label indicates nothing more than Canadian origin and the name of the producer. Finally, Couchman writes that the authenticity of a work is irrelevant to its quality. Upon seeking further clarification on the status of quality, especially given the Igloo Tag's role as both an official mark and a certification mark, Couchman states, "If Canada stops a German from giving himself a native name and marketing his stuff as if he were a native, we would also have to stop Canadian wine producers from giving their products German names" (Denhez *The Labelling of Imitation Native Art* 55).

In August 1983, former ITK President John Amagoalik published a statement on the impact of fakelore on Arctic communities:

In recent years, fake Inuit art has been popping up all over the country. This has had the effect of making worse a bad situation in the soapstone market because of the recent economic recession. The people who produce these fakes are causing even more economic hardships to small Inuit communities which depend heavily on the art which has become the most distinct type of Canadian art to the rest of the world.

The people who produce these fakes are committing 'spiritual and cultural theft.' The government has 'mumbled' a few times about 'being concerned' but has not had the political will to act. . . . *Qallunaat* has tried many times to steal our land — now some of them are trying to steal part of our culture by producing 'manufactured art'. These cold lumps of plastic have no right disguised as Inuit art and their makers should have never been allowed to use Inuktitut-sounding names. (Inuit Today 4)

In 1984, as previously mentioned, Gunther Abrahamson retired from DIAND and the Northern Program dissolved, and with it, the management of the Igloo Tag. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, an extensive imitation market had been documented and valued at an estimated \$40–80 million annually. During this time period there were requests to the federal Native Economic Development programme by the national Indian Arts and Crafts Corporation (with the support of Arctic Cooperatives Limited, the Professional Art Dealers Association of Canada, and Canadian Artists Representation) to fund an official economic impact study of the imitation Inuit art market. After numerous postponements from the government, the request was ultimately declined (Denhez *The Labelling of Imitation Native Art* 4). However, Denhez informally documented the extent of the sales of fakes. Imitations were found in the largest Parks

Canada retail locations in Banff, Alberta; Victoria, British Columbia; Niagara Falls, Ontario; and Parry Sound, Ontario, as well as in the showrooms of La Guilde and at the HBC store in Yellowknife that shipped to HBC locations across the country, among other places. Imitations in the international market reached as far as the Canadian Pavilion at the Epcot Centre in Florida and Buckingham Palace, UK (Denhez *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art* 5–37, *The Labelling of Imitation Native Art* 1).

## Analysis

The Igloo Tag was never successful in protecting Inuit artists against fraudulent works. As Denhez states,

Although the federally-supported programmes identified authentic products, they were no way intended to curtail misrepresentation in imitation products (except imitation of the tags themselves). In short, the Federal Government did not then (nor has it since) controlled the language whereby imitators market their products to an unsuspecting public. The assumption has presumably been that in the event of a gross misrepresentation, the purchaser could either resort to the civil courts (which are none of the Federal Government's concern), or alternatively request the authorities to undertake an action for 'misleading advertising' under The Combines Investigation Act (now called Competition Act), which is a procedure in the nature of criminal law. In fact, with only a few exceptions, that is the way in which all consumer protection issues were handled in the 1950s. (Denhez *Regulation of Fake Inuit Art* 49)

As mentioned above, the government dissolved the department regulating the Igloo Tag program and ultimately transferred the trademark to the IAF in 2017. Although the fate of the tag is now in control of the IAF as an arm's-length representative of Canada's Inuit artists, it remains an organization with significantly less power and

resources than the federal government to combat the fraudulent art that continues to plague the market.

The IAF has already begun to expand the trademark through extensive community in-person consultations<sup>52</sup> as well as an online survey<sup>53</sup> to see how the future of the tag can best serve artists. However progressive, these consultations are few and far between. To date, the consultations have only been conducted in a few communities across the Arctic and have not involved a focused group of artists who primarily work in digitally-based art or new media. Although much work needs to be done in terms of outreach, change is beginning to be achieved. The IAF is updating the appearance of the trademark by removing the word “Eskimo” and offering new design choices to the community. These choices include the images shown in Figure 6.2.

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<sup>52</sup> See <http://igloutag.inuitartfoundation.org/consultationsummaries/>.

<sup>53</sup> See <http://igloutag.inuitartfoundation.org/survey/>.

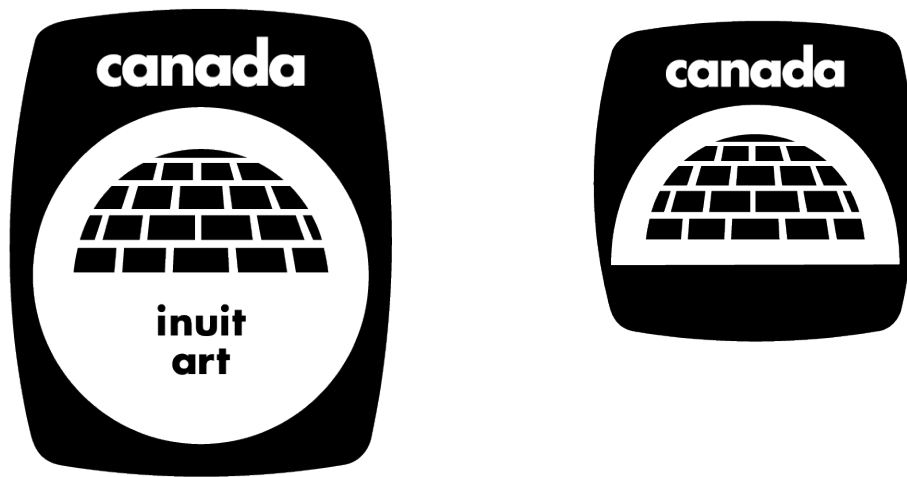


Figure 6.2. Inuit Art Foundation. *Variations of Updated Igloo Tag Trademark*. 2017.

Upon taking control of the Igloo Tag trademark, the IAF simultaneously entered into license agreements with the existing six licensees grandfathered in from INAC. The new licenses must be renewed every five years and strictly forbid sublicensing. New licensees agree to updated terms of the use of the trademark:

(a) while the License is in effect; (b) only in Canada; (c) only in an ethical manner and in strict compliance with all applicable laws; (d) only in association with the Goods and Services; and (e) strictly in accordance with the requirements set out in this Agreement. The Licensee shall not use the Marks for any other purpose other than those set out herein and shall not change the Marks or use variations of the Marks. Licensee will not, directly or indirectly, sublicense or otherwise assist, permit or encourage any other person to use any of the Marks without first obtaining the prior written consent of Licensor in each instance. (Inuit Art Foundation *Trademark License Agreement 2*)

This language removes the limitations on artistic practice and broadens the scope of artist location to all of Canada under the tag. In addition, for the first time in 45 years, the IAF has begun to issue licenses to businesses including one to Inuk gallerist Lori Idlout, owner of the Iqaluit-based, family-owned gallery Carvings Nunavut (Otak). Idlout is the first Inuk licensee in the history of the tag. She states, “I am very proud of this gallery and the work we have put into supporting Inuit artists. This will go a long way to ensure we can continue to support Inuit artists, not just within Nunavut but abroad as well. . . . I am a huge proponent of Inuit syllabics, so it was exciting to be able to sign the license and application both in English and Inuktitut” (Inuit Art Foundation). There are many positive changes ahead for the Igloo Tag trademark; however, unless it is innovated it will not be a useful mechanism for artists working in new media, particularly those working within the Inuit futurisms framework, and it may perpetuate the colonialist history the IAF is trying to work past.

In finding an amplified voice on social media, Inuit artists now have space to discuss the extensive impacts of colonialism, including the Western historical narrative of the art market in Nunavut, which has been dominated by Euro-Canadian perspectives for over 70 years. Not only is the art market founded upon capitalist Euro-Canadian systems of distribution and promotion, but on colonial ideals and theories of “art” and its “value” that clash with Inuit principles of IQ. Whether working within or outside of the contemporary market, Inuit artists are participating in a non-Indigenous economy, which influences their potential for innovation and leadership. Although change has been incredibly slow, initiatives that are currently being developed by the IAF in the interest of Inuit – particularly the Igloo Tag program – join history, economic

stimulation, and technology to promote new visions of the future. Although the Igloo Tag is still being managed from a southern location, it arguably represents mechanisms of Inuit self-determination and market control via brand name recognition and authority over intellectual property rights of Inuit arts.



## CHAPTER 7: INTERNET INFRASTRUCTURE IN NUNAVUT

Inuit leaders and representative organizations have been calling for federally supported, Inuit-developed frameworks for advanced ICT innovation to meet the needs of communities. At issue is the question, “How can community-first ICT policies and infrastructure disrupt the *status quo* of the declining colonial Inuit art market in Nunavut?” First-mile infrastructure development and equitable high-speed broadband, which currently do not exist in the territory, are required to promote and support Inuit culture. By placing ownership and control of broadband infrastructure within and for Inuit communities — and thus the arts economy — decolonization, self-determination, cultural sovereignty, and Inuit-led economic growth will occur in Nunavut. If the Canadian federal government invested as much in Inuit-led, long-term ICT policy development as it does in out-dated southern-based infrastructure, Nunavummiut would have the financial support they need to create a lasting ICT strategy, supporting a new vision of cultural entrepreneurship.

As programs like the Igloo Tag trademark and movements such as Inuit futurisms strive to innovate within the art market in Nunavut, government voices, including Iqaluit’s Mayor Madelyn Redfern, continuously address the need for internet access. In a 2018 interview, Redfern describes the connectivity issues that have been plaguing the territory:

We don’t have fibre optic compared to other provinces or territories which do have them, especially into the main cities or capitals, and the internet is very slow. It’s very inconsistent in speed and quality, often drops, and then in addition

it's extremely expensive. . . . It makes it very difficult to be able to do our work ... It's very hard when you can't send files, or anything with a large amount of data, or download documents, or even go onto the Internet and be able to access video content. As a result, everything is hampered. There's a lot of wasted time and productivity, a lot of frustrations. . . . One big challenge, of course, is that we can't do, for the most part, distance education, or webinars because our connectivity is simply too slow, or it's unstable. Or, of course, it's so expensive that it is prohibitive even if you were able to address the issues of speed and stability. . . . Costs rarely ever go down. . . . Unfortunately, we've got a lot of people that don't understand the issue well enough to realize that we're in critical mode [with the internet]. (15–17)

Inuit communities continue to struggle with expensive inequitable access to internet connections provided by companies backed by government funds: the very same companies that have continuously taken advantage of Indigenous consumers. There must be a long-term, sustainable solution that places authority of technology within communities to facilitate and promote Inuit artistic practices, storytelling, and worldviews. New media technologies will shape future ICT structures and systems in new and innovative Indigenous ways (Lewis 72). Access to first-mile high-speed broadband is essential for economic growth, Indigenization of global dialogues, and broadening avenues of decolonization.

### **Overview of ICT Infrastructure Development in Nunavut**

Even before Nunavut became an officially recognized government, Nunavummiut had internet access. Modern internet capability reached Nunavut in 1995 with the

establishment of internet service provider (ISP) Nunanet Worldwide Communications (Nunanet)<sup>54</sup> founded by Adamee Itorcheak in Iqaluit (Itorcheak). Nunanet provided dial-up connections using a standard telephone line and analogue modems to access the internet at data transfer rates (DTRs)<sup>55</sup> of up to 56 kilobits per second (Kbps).<sup>56</sup> Although standard service for the time, as demand for internet increased, more customers meant slower connections. This network was unreliable and required frequent and extensive upgrades to meet the accelerating needs of the widespread communities (*Broadband Training Strategy*).

The lack of ICT infrastructure planning is particularly troublesome because strong connectivity was one of the required technologies for implementing the decentralized government of Nunavut in 1999. According to Jack Hicks and Graham White, authors of *Made in Nunavut: An Experiment in Decentralized Government*, “Modern governments cannot function without complex, highly sophisticated — and expensive

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<sup>54</sup> Nunanet Worldwide Communications ran independently until 1999 when the company entered a joint regional partnership to form Inukshuk Communications (also known as Inukshuk Internet Inc.). In 2001, Inukshuk was purchased by Microcell Telecommunications Inc. for \$150 million. In 2005, Microcell was acquired by Rogers Communication for \$1.4 billion. Although no longer an ISP, Nunanet shifted to focus on ICT solutions and repair until the remaining components of the company were purchased by Qikiqtaaluk Information Technology Corporation in 2007, now known as the Iqaluit Electronics Store (Qikiqtaaluk Corporation, Internet Archive: Nunanet.com, Government of Canada, Competition Bureau, Microcell to Acquire Complete Ownership of Inukshuk Internet Inc.).

<sup>55</sup> A DTR, usually measured in megabits per second (mbps), refers to the speed at which a device or network component can send and receive data (Data Transfer Rate).

<sup>56</sup> By today’s standard, Kbps are the slowest DTR and only available to dial-up users. For reference, 1 Kbps transmits 1,000 bits per second, whereas 1 mbps transmits 1 million bits per second and 1 Gig (Gbps) transmits 1 billion bits per second.

— computer systems. The creation of a new government offered a remarkable opportunity to take advantage of the new, most advanced information technology, not in least realizing the ambitious plan for decentralization” (231). During the process of establishing the Government of Nunavut (GN), consultants warned lawmakers in Ottawa that the connectivity infrastructure they were implementing was not sufficient to carry both the government and the people into the new millennium. Maryantonett Flumian of the Office of the Interim Commissioner identified the lack of robust internet connections as the most troubling challenge to the establishment of the GN, writing, “The bandwidth provided by the new [satellite communications] network is tiny compared to the facilities in Yellowknife or the South. The network will be the single most difficult constraint in Nunavut for many years to come” (Hicks and White 232).

In 2001, faced with substandard, inadequate internet, the Government of Nunavut formed the Nunavut Broadband Task Force whose mandate was to provide recommendations on broadband issues affecting the territory. After two years of consultation and planning, the task force released the first comprehensive internet development policy in the Territory: *Sivumuuqpallianiq, Moving Forward: Strengthening our Self-Reliance in the Information Age*. The task force responded quickly to the needs of Nunavummiut: “We have ‘narrowband’ connections, so it takes a long time for information to go from one location to another. Imagine a herd of caribou coming to a narrow water crossing — the herd slows down to a halt, falls into single file, and takes a long time to cross the stream. This is the way information is currently being transmitted in Nunavut” (*Sivumuuqpallianiq, Moving Forward* 1). *Sivumuuqpallianiq* centralizes the principles of IQ and recommends infrastructure development policies to

support Inuit oral culture and community health and wellbeing. The seven principles of broadband development, as defined by the task force, are as follows:

1. Support Our Oral Culture  
(IQ: *Inuuqatigiitsiarniq*: Respecting others, relationships and caring for people.)
2. Provide Universal, Affordable Access  
(IQ: *Tunnganarniq*: Fostering good spirits by being open, welcoming and inclusive.)
3. Communities Come First  
(IQ: *Aajiqatigiinni*: Decision making through discussion and consensus.)
4. Build Capacity in the Private Sector  
(IQ: *Qanuqtuurniq*: Being innovative and resourceful.)
5. Provide Equality of Access to Public Services  
(IQ: *Pijitsirniq*: Serving and providing for family and/or community.)
6. Promote Inuit Language and Culture  
(IQ: *Piliriqatigiinni*/*Ikajuqtigiinni*: Working together for a common cause.)
7. Ensure Advancement and Innovation of Services  
(IQ: *Pilimmaksarniq*/*Pijariuqsarniq*: Development of skills through observation, mentoring, practice, and effort.)  
(Nunavut Broadband Task Force 3–4, Inuit Societal Values)

As digital communication infrastructure developed in the territory, the Nunavut Broadband Task Force was concerned with meeting the needs of communities before the profit margins of companies. Their goal was to ensure the internet would be used as a tool to support oral tradition and the transmission of IQ, and in turn, foster healthy communities and culturally strong people and increase self-reliance. By advocating for all Nunavummiut to have equal access to affordable broadband services, Inuit across the territory would have the opportunity to learn about infrastructure and have access to online resources. In this way, everyone could achieve his or her economic, social, and cultural goals. During this process, the task force responded to the rapid rate of

innovation in the ICT sector by recommending Nunavummiut build Inuktitut-based applications that could evolve with the advancement of technology. Finally, they recommended that community-driven policies surrounding infrastructure development in Nunavut include on-going assessment, measure progress, and be flexible to meet the changing needs of communities (Nunavut Broadband Task Force 3–4).

Unfortunately, the recommendations of the task force remain unmet largely due to the satellite service monopoly of the Canadian company Telesat. Telesat established a stronghold over ICT in Nunavut long before modern internet connectivity.<sup>57</sup> This monopoly allows the company to sell incredibly expensive connectivity to ISPs such as SSi Micro and Northwestel.

### **Current ICT Infrastructure Capacity**

Today, as described by Redfern, telecommunication connections in the Canadian Arctic are improving, but at incredible costs to northern users, because private, for-profit, companies own the infrastructure and control access to connections. In

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<sup>57</sup> In 1972 Telesat Canada, a leading global satellite operator, launched the Anik A1 satellite. *Anik*, named after the Inuktitut word for “brother,” was significant as not only the first satellite to deliver communication to Canada’s north but also as a breakthrough technology. It was the first domestic communications system in history to position a satellite in the geostationary orbit of the Earth. Also known as an Equatorial orbit, the satellite is positioned above the equator and follows the rotation of the earth, appearing stationary to a ground observer (National Museum of Science and Technology, *Anik A1 Satellite Launching: Bridging the Gap*, Telesat). Anik A1 propelled Canada as a global leader in technology and displayed the nation’s authority over the Arctic. The Anik A1 Satellite had a “design life” or estimated lifespan of seven years but was used for broadcasting until 2013 (National Museum of Science and Technology).

Nunavut, all internet service is satellite-based wireless, which is expensive and unreliable compared to southern fibre optic connections. Internet is purchased by the Government of Nunavut and distributed to users through two networks: the core business network and the community service network. The usage and content of the networks are monitored by both the ISP and the Department of Community and Government Services. According to Eric Corneau, former dean of Nunavut Arctic College, the amount of bandwidth the government purchases per year depends on financing: “It is budget based. The Community Service Network actually operates on 16.9 Gigabytes (GB) and that is for the entire territory and it is split between community learning centres, health centres, and schools. The Core Business Network has 25.8 GB, that is the premium package for businesses only. . . . It is 100% budgetary. Telesat charges thousands of dollars per month for an mbps of bandwidth. There is no cap for the Government but we pay thousands of dollars for mbps” (Interview with Eric Corneau). As Corneau describes, the government operates a third network in Nunavut, and although it is subject to the same outages as the other networks, there are no data usage caps placed on users.

In Nunavut, the bar for establishing the required high-speed bandwidth is set low. In 2011, the federal government announced a partnership with the CRTC to ensure connection download speeds of 5 mbps for all Canadians by the end of 2015. At the time that this initiative began, the residential connection speed caps were set at 2 mbps in Nunavut. Currently, the basic residential package caps at 3 mbps with the subsidized 5 mbps plan costing \$399 per month plus the cost of modem rental (Qiniq). By comparison, the January 2019 average wireless download speed in Canada was

59.61 mbps, and the wired or fixed broadband (which is not available in Nunavut) speed was 91.05 mbps. Globally, Canada ranks as having the fourth fastest mobile and 16<sup>th</sup> fastest wired internet speed (Speedtest Global Index April 2018).

Of the connectivity in Canada, internet users in Nunavut, along with the other territories, are excluded from statistics due to insufficient data (CIRA). However, in 2014 the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA) reported, “Whereas broadband is available to 100 per cent of Canadians that live in urban areas, only 85 per cent of Canadians in rural areas have access. The urban/rural/remote divide is even more pronounced in the Canadian North. A 2010 report from the CRTC showed that 83.5 per cent of households in the Northwest Territories had Internet access, 100 per cent of communities in the Yukon had access, yet only 27 per cent of communities in Nunavut had access.” Given the available data, it is clear to see that Nunavut has the slowest internet speeds and the least amount of access in the country.

The government is investing a significant amount of money in Nunavut’s infrastructure to implement technologies that are already out of date in terms of global usage rates, not to mention the global demand and appetite for cultural pluralism. In the summer of 2018, Telesat launched a new geostationary satellite to provide Nunavut with faster service, which became available for use in August. As part of a \$500 million federal initiative to expand high-speed internet to remote communities, the government granted Northwestel (a subsidiary of Bell Canada) approximately \$50 million to access the satellite to provide service to communities as well as wholesale rates to local companies. Northwestel began providing the upgraded service in Iqaluit on October 1, 2018. The best package costs \$129 per month for a maximum speed of 15 mbps per



second, with a data cap of 100 GB per month (Telesat, Frizzell *New Satellite, Northwestel Asks Feds*). By comparison, Bell Canada has a 25 mbps internet-only landline service in Ontario with 350 GB of data for about \$80 per month. Tripling the internet speed in Nunavut still results in the slowest and most expensive internet service in the country. As Redfern argues,

[In Nunavut] we're just about to increase our speed three-fold, which is going from 5MB per second to 15[MB]. When I look at the speeds of what's happening in southern Canada or elsewhere in the world, we're just falling further and further behind even with our supposedly significant incremental increase of three times more. Three times of very little is still very little, especially when you consider that in the south, you have unlimited data and bundling features to reduce costs. The bundles of the Internet, cable television and cell phones – you can get packages of \$100.00 that include all three; two hundred dollars for the top end package. We could only dream of that quality of connectivity in that cost based on sort of stability, speed, and data. (Kennedy Dalseg 16)

From a cultural standpoint, Inuit artists increasingly desire to incorporate new media technologies into their expression – as seen in Inuit futurisms – and cultural influence, but broadband is falling short of their needs. In 2017, two of the top films at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) were filmed in Nunavut and based on Inuit culture: Zacharias Kunuk's *Maliglutit* (Searchers) and Alethea Arnaquq-Baril's documentary *Angry Inuk* (Taylor). Each filmmaker had to travel south for editing and software updates, which constituted enormous expense for these artists. In 2015, film, media, writing and publishing had a direct sectoral impact of approximately \$3.6 million on the Nunavut economy. However, education and mentorships in the required skills to work in film, media, writing, and publishing are not currently offered to

students in the territory, because many resources necessary for these fields depend heavily on reliable internet capacity (Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy). It is currently very difficult for artists and aspiring entrepreneurs to run businesses online due to speed and reliability issues. As a result, it is impossible for the remote and isolated communities of the Arctic to become sustainable in a globalized economy without equitable access to the internet.

### **Canadian First Nations and Inuit Community Infrastructure Development**

In *Digital Divides and the First Mile* (2011), which builds off of the 1998 publication *The First Mile of Connectivity* by Don Richardson and Lynnita Paisley, authors McMahon et al. argue that broadband development in Canada has been a paternalistic, colonial-derived process based on antiquated development policies that, most egregiously, do not represent the needs of First Peoples. “While government funds for public services in First Nations (and Inuit) are guaranteed due to treaty relationships,” they state, “levels of funding are often insufficient and not administered by the federal government in a manner that meets community needs. A trend over the past two decades indicates that the federal government has been converting program funding in government departments to short-term project and one-time capital funding, and therefore many social and community services lack stability” (9). The authors note the differing levels of access to broadband infrastructure and connectivity services that exist across the country, with a particular focus on the disparity of service in rural/remote areas versus urban centres, thus creating significant digital divides. They

argue for a first-mile broadband framework that foregrounds community-based involvement, control, and ownership.

Typically, last-mile approaches to ICT development take existing technologies and try to fit Indigenous needs into the pre-existing Western technological context. This approach frames the differences between rural and urban communities as “problems” or “shortcomings” to be addressed by linking unserved communities to already-existing systems and infrastructures. The authors assert, “The concept of the ‘last-mile’ carries a lot of negative connotations and compels us to assume the perspective of an urbanite looking down at the rural margins” (6). Examples of this are the implementation of retired satellites, DSL systems, online cashboxes, cloud-based intranets, and mesh networks that are all last-mile technologies employed in the north as workarounds for low connection speeds. If a first-mile approach were taken, by contrast, technology development would be based on and address community cultural needs. The necessity of ground-up consultation is central to an Indigenized development of ICT infrastructure to achieve what McMahon et al., Hopkins, and Loft imagine.

There are examples of Canadian First Nations and Inuit communities in Nunavik (northern Quebec) taking control of broadband development with a first-mile approach. The formation of the Northern Indigenous Community Satellite Network (NICSN) is discussed at length in both *Putting the Last Mile First* and McMahon’s *From the First Mile to Outer Space: Tamaani Satellite Internet in Northern Quebec*, as well as on the documentary website *History of NICSN* created by the network. In this model, three parties came together to construct a shared, satellite-based connection that serves 43

remote and isolated communities in a dispersed geographic region. The NICSN is a not-for-profit cooperative managed by an inter-provincial partnership between First Nations and Inuit communities in northern Quebec, Ontario, and Manitoba. The NICSN was able to organize essential elements that made this project so successful. The first was strong and motivated leadership. The NICSN is jointly managed by Keewatinook Okimakanak (KO) in Ontario, Kativik Regional Government (KRG) in Quebec, and Keewatin Tribal Council in Manitoba. Together these groups were able to leverage their respective provincial policies and secure individual donors to help fund the project. Second, they were able to acquire a “public benefit” incentive from the satellite provider Telesat. In 2000, Industry Canada initiated a new “public benefit” condition for some satellite licenses that require satellite providers to reserve 2% of revenues or the equivalent amount in satellite capacity for programs that improve connectivity in underserved areas of Canada. This mandates that satellites over the Arctic must offer a certain amount of bandwidth capacity at a duration of the life of the satellite or 15 years at a lower than average cost for the good of the public<sup>58</sup> (McMahon, *History of NICSN*, Consultation on the Licensing Framework for Fixed-Satellite Service, Satellite Inquiry Report).

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<sup>58</sup> The Government of Nunavut negotiated the public benefit for the territory (12.5 megahertz of C-band satellite capacity) to be reserved for schools and health-care centres from 2003 to 2022, an estimated value of \$15.675 million. C-band is a type of frequency band that is typically allocated for commercial telecommunications (Imaituk Inc. 93, Consultation on the Licensing Framework for Fixed-Satellite Service, Satellite Inquiry Report).

The NICSN negotiated use of this benefit because of the core delivery services it provides to Indigenous communities. The cooperative was able to secure bandwidth for 15 years from 2005 to 2020 with the additional costs being covered by the federal government. Upgrades to the transponders that act as the backbone of the network began in 2011. The costs of upgrades had been prepaid by Broadband Canada. The network is managed from the hub earth station in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, which allows the organization greater control and autonomy. Finally, NICSN were able to start small and grow the project over time, expanding the network over the course of 20 years. The project began in 1994 when KO Chiefs established a small amount of bandwidth for six communities. Over the next two decades, neighbouring communities were able to buy into the project, leaving time for community feedback and organizing mechanisms that served each individual community (McMahon, *History of NICSN*).

Broadband development in Nunavut Territory has been the result of a top-down, last-mile model with little to no community control. In *Putting the Last Mile First*, McMahon et al. analyze the Telecommunications Act of 1993 and the Broadcasting Act revisions of 1991 to argue that historically, federal policies have been based in assimilation practices and have undermined the self-government and self-determination of First Peoples. They state that because policy and socioeconomic factors shape broadband infrastructure and connectivity, governmental initiatives should be used to support policy development that leads to the formal transfer of power and control to community-based Indigenous organizations (3–4). The authors state, “it is not enough for a community to simply be ‘connected’; a community must also be connected in ways that support sustainable, locally-driven development and

operational practices” (4). *Putting the Last Mile First* ultimately argues that any comprehensive digital economy or ‘broadband connectivity’ development strategy beyond community-centred development must include support for both broadband infrastructure and on-going maintenance of those networks.

An important focus in the Arctic context is building first-mile technology from the community level up and leveraging regional investment advantages to gain the most control over policies and deployment (Capello 185). Inuit leaders are pushing for policies that reflect community needs and can be assessed, as seen in the Nunavut Broadband Task Force’s recommendations, in terms of their impact on regional health, wellbeing, and growth. In the *Nunavut Economic Development Strategy* policy document, the Government of Nunavut states, “Telecommunications and broadband infrastructure in Nunavut are essential to building the knowledge base in our communities. Broadband, in particular, has been described by the Conference Board of Canada as having ‘the capacity to transform Nunavut’s economy’” (61). Similarly, Mayor Redfern consistently lobbies for stronger capacity in the territory. She states, “Inuit are using internet to develop cultural content, share it, of course, not only with ourselves but also with the world” (Indigenous Connectivity Summit Participants Share Their Stories). Redfern concludes that innovations are stifled by slow connections, which slows productivity (Evans).

A major gap in the literature surrounding Arctic connectivity issues is a plan or logistical mapping for establishing a realistic, sustainable, and implementable broadband development model for Arctic communities in Nunavut. The top-down, last-mile model of internet deployment is not acting as an effective means to establish

equitable online access. While the strength of the first-mile theory is addressing community-specific ICT needs, the weaknesses surround cost and leadership roles. The affordability challenge incorporates aspects from both the internal budget of communities and the external profit margins of internet service providers.

Since technology is constantly evolving, new innovations are creating fresh opportunities almost daily as older technologies become obsolete or unusable. Service providers offer new packages with increased speeds without explaining the technology or providing pricing plans. For example, 3G mobile technology<sup>59</sup> is available in most communities in Nunavut. 4G mobile technology, released in 2010 and widely available by 2012, was the next step forward and promised speeds up to 10 times faster than 3G (Segan, Stringfellow). In September 2017, five years after it was available in the south, Qiniq and Northwestel promised 4G service to all Nunavut communities by 2019. Northwestel markets this upgrade as “enhanced broadband wireless solutions” for communities in Nunavut, which will provide “residents and businesses with access to the same broadband service levels as those in most remote Northern communities in Canada” (High-Speed Internet and 4G Wireless Coming to Every Nunavut Community). 4G will definitely be an upgrade to mobile connectivity in Nunavut, especially since 3G is beginning to become obsolete. However, it is important to consider some challenges that are not publicized by Northwestel.

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<sup>59</sup> 3G stands for third generation, which is defined by the speed at which the network transmits data as well as advancement in encoding interfaces, making it incompatible with generations that came before.

The first consideration is that one of the differences between 3G and 4G is that the latter does not have regulations to guarantee a minimum speed. If the 4G network is at optimal service, users will experience faster and stronger internet connections. However, this also means users could be using a 4G connection that is slower and more unreliable than 3G since there is no regulating body to oversee the service (Stringfellow). Second, Northwestel is selling Nunavummiut a technology that will bring them up to speed with the second-worst rates of connectivity in the country. The technology is better, but the infrastructure will probably not put Inuit artists on the same playing field as southern artists for long, if at all.

Additionally, 5G technology will roll out in Toronto and Ottawa in the winter or spring of 2019. New 5G-compliant devices will require networks that have “higher speeds and lower latencies” for increased streaming and to support virtual and augmented reality features (Behar). Furthermore, smart device manufacturers are forcing consumers to upgrade their products by placing codes in regularly scheduled updates that slows the device over time, a process known as “planned obsolescence” (Kottasová, Sarhan). Not only will the network infrastructure be out of date before it is installed in Nunavut, but companies could kill the devices that connect to 4G to force new products onto the market.<sup>60</sup>

As noted above, communities must currently prioritize their internet access between health, education, and cultural uses because of the colonial structuring of the

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<sup>60</sup> Planned obsolescence became illegal in France in 2015. It is currently legal in Canada.



networks. This is a colonialist division, because the foundations of IQ inseparably combine cultural expression with health and education. There are connectivity solutions, such as high-capacity satellites and fibre optic cabling, that are possible to employ in the Arctic; however, in order to install these technologies, a shift from last-mile to first-mile methods of deployment need to be utilized and supported by comprehensive and flexible government policies.

## **Recommendations**

Although ICT infrastructure strategy, innovation, and assessment need to come directly from the Inuit community, there are ways that the government can support Nunavummiut goals. First, the Canadian federal government should invest as much in Inuit-led, long-term ICT policy development as it does in out-dated southern-based infrastructure. According to a 2017 assessment by Nunavut internet provider SSi Micro, between 2005 and 2018 the federal government invested approximately \$180 million in territorial communications infrastructure (Proctor). In 2018, the federal government committed to a \$566 million investment over the next 10 years, of which \$327.6 million (approximately 58%) is designated to improve quality of life in remote communities, including broadband connectivity (Hwang). There is not currently a policy for ICT development in Nunavut, but such a policy is needed to make strategic investments in infrastructure that further Inuit goals. As executive director of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corporation (NBDC), Oana Spinu, states, “Market forces alone are insufficient to guarantee that there’s adequate telecommunication services in the

territory. . . . What's happening now is that providers are competing for subsidies and not customers and we're left with parallel regulated monopolies. . . . Right now there isn't a single point of contact for the Arctic broadband issue. . . . It poses a challenge because there isn't a kind of coherent single vision for the future of telecommunication in the North" (Sahar Zerehi). If equal money was invested in Inuit-led communication policy development, Nunavummiut would have the financial support they need to create a shared vision on infrastructure through a lasting, flexible ICT strategy that includes indicators for measured progress, upgrading infrastructure, and ongoing maintenance, as suggested by the Nunavut Broadband Development Taskforce and McMahon et al.

Second, Nunavummiut should occupy all federal positions that represent Nunavummiut voices. There are important positions at the highest levels of government that make decisions on behalf of Nunavut and Inuit culture but are not filled by Inuit. In the 2017 report entitled *Arctic Policy Framework Regional Roundtable Session*, during a roundtable discussion on regional policy development held in Iqaluit, the government noted that participants suggest, "Strengthening North-to-North cooperation instead of importing solutions from the south" (Arctic Policy Framework). One of the main arguments from the roundtable was that governance, policies, and services that are grounded in Inuit culture and language are imperative to supporting strong and healthy communities (Arctic Policy Framework). However, the commissioner representing Nunavut on the CRTC, the executive director of the northern region in the department

of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada (ISED),<sup>61</sup> board members on the Canada Council for the Arts, and the regional director general of the northern region in the Department of Canadian Heritage, among others, are all currently non-Inuit. Inuit representation on these powerful bodies, a framework outlined in the publication *A New Approach to Economic Development in Nunavut*, would ensure that economic development, especially cultural and infrastructure development policies, would be guided by IQ and Inuit culture. This approach would guarantee that an Inuit worldview would be applied to decisions and actions that influence Inuit lives, as well as support sovereignty and self-determination (Qikiqtani Inuit Association 3).

Finally, first-mile, equitable, affordable, high-speed broadband should be constructed in Nunavut so that Inuit artists can be free to experiment with new media, especially Inuit futurisms, within their communities and directly engage with opportunities of economic growth, including training on the latest available applications and technologies. As described in *A New Approach to Economic Development in Nunavut*, “Economic development is not only about the economy. . . . [E]conomic development is about long-term social transformation based on wealth creation and improving health, education, housing, public safety, and access to the land. . . . [E]conomic and social development are inseparable” (12). Economic, and in turn ICT, development in Nunavut must support IQ and culturally strong communities. This

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<sup>61</sup> The CRTC and ISED are the two federal departments that have jurisdiction over broadband-related issues in Canada (Telecommunications Infrastructure Working Group 6).

means that culture is integrated into policy and governance as well as skills training, job creation and retention, and entrepreneurial development that provides holistic and sustainable long-term benefits for Inuit communities (Qikiqtani Inuit Association 13, Arctic Policy Framework). In 2005 the NBDC published the *Nunavut Broadband Training Strategy*, a program that offered culturally and linguistically appropriate training in infrastructure installation and repair as well as sectoral specific skills development (5). Recognizing the importance of the visual arts sector the NBDC offered training to artists and arts organizations on website promotion and e-commerce, communication management, finding sources of funding, and project planning (46). An updated training strategy that expands on the 2005 program should be developed with the implementation of high-speed broadband so that arts professionals can have culturally and linguistically appropriate training opportunities in the areas of social media networking, digital financial management, application development, database workflows, cloud-based data organization, smart phone and tablet for business, and the potential of virtual and augmented reality, which is the basis of the digital transformation that is needed to grow the market in the future.

Lack of technological and administrative innovation has caused the art market in Nunavut to stall. Unstable, slow, and costly internet connections perpetuate out-dated arts management and distribution chains in the cultural economy, deepening the disparity between opportunities available to Arctic-based and southern-based artists. By supporting a first-mile approach to ICT development as well as long-term policy strategies, the federal government would help further Inuit self-determination and

decolonization in the arts sector. Only through solutions designed by and for Inuit communities will the Arctic economy begin to achieve growth.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

“In some ways, I think I am fortunate to have been part and parcel of an era when cultural change pointed its ugly head to so many Inuit who eventually became victims of this transitional change. It is to our credit that, as a distinct culture, we have kept our eyes and intuition on both sides of the cultural tide, aspiring, as always to win the battle as well as the war. Today, we are still mired in the battle, but the war is finally ending.”

Alootook Ipellie,  
*Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*

Inuit new media serves to amplify Inuit engagement in rewriting the past, sharing stories and traditional knowledge, and taking hold of how communities envision their future. Creative solutions designed by and for Inuit communities living in remote and isolated locations are required to achieve growth in the Inuit arts and crafts sector in Nunavut. As a consequence of the high cost of ICT coupled with stagnant administrative innovation, the art market has failed to grow over the last decade, leaving the Nunavut Inuit arts and crafts sector in stasis due to a lack of technological and administrative innovation, among other factors. Without reliable, low-cost internet connections and sectoral support for Inuit artists working in new media, colonial control of the arts in Nunavut will continue. An Indigenous methodological development framework of decolonization and Indigenization would support Inuit-led paths to revitalizing the sector.

Inuit visual arts and crafts are an extraordinary form of expression that embodies oral tradition, personal narratives, and Inuit worldviews and values for generations to

come. Nunavummiut artists are engaging in emerging technologies – often from southern locations due to connectivity restrictions – as platforms of cultural expression through the Indigenous or Inuit futurisms movement. In a globalized, connected world, IF sharply responds to a persistent colonial narrative of Inuit history. Indigenous futurisms visualizes a new future through fusing Indigenous cultural heritage and new media technologies to centralize Indigenous artwork, storytelling, and worldviews. This movement is a powerful influence in Indigenizing ICT.

Artists are curating a vision for the future of Nunavummiut, as demonstrated through the work of artists including Couzyn van Heuvelen and Ruben Anton Komangapik, who find ways to merge important aspects of Inuit culture such as hunting and carving with new technologies and play with the role of tradition in new creation methods in the contemporary landscape; Nyla Innuksuk and Jesse Tungilik, who experiment with new technologies to make important comments on contemporary Inuit and Indigenous life; and the artist collective Mittimatalik Arnait Miqsuqtuit, who collaborate to document and disseminate traditional skills and knowledge for the health, wellbeing, and longevity of Inuit culture. Indigenous futurisms centralize Indigenous artwork, storytelling, and worldviews through new media technologies that reshape and decolonize ICT. As such, Inuit futurisms are key to revitalizing the arts and crafts market in Nunavut through digital disruption, which prepares the market for consumers of the future.

Expanding on the arguments of Jason Edward Lewis, robust, equitable internet connections will make it possible for Inuit to engage in the futurisms movement, to produce new works that reflect modern Inuit life, to educate future generations on how

the principles of IQ can be involved in digital media, and to create new first-mile technologies that bring the production of those technologies to Nunavut. Although Western media promotes capitalism and colonialist ideologies, Indigenous communities use ICT to strengthen cultural ties within and outside of local environments. Furthermore, the creation and dissemination of Indigenous digital content reflects social values and knowledge and pushes back on the boundaries of colonialism. Through social media platforms such as Facebook, as seen in the #sealfie movement, Inuit activists are leveraging art to reframe the conversation concerning Arctic life and culture. Although challenged by limited connectivity, #sealfie demonstrates that content generated by community members provides culturally strengthening opportunities to communicate with local, national, and international networks.

In finding an amplified voice on social media, Inuit artists now have space to discuss the extensive impacts of colonialism, including the Western historical narrative of the art market in Nunavut, which has been dominated by Euro-Canadian perspectives for over 70 years. An analysis of this history highlights not only how far artists – particularly those engaged in the Inuit futurisms movement – have come in reclaiming the past, but also how far there is still to go in decolonizing the sector. The art market is not only founded upon capitalist Euro-Canadian systems of distribution and promotion but on colonial ideals and theories of “art” and its “value” that clash with Inuit principles of IQ. Whether working within or outside of the contemporary market, Inuit artists are participating in a non-Indigenous economy, which influences their potential for innovation and leadership. Although change has been incredibly slow,



there are initiatives – particularly the Igloo Tag program – that are currently being developed by the IAF in the interest of Inuit to join history, economic stimulation, and technology to promote new visions of the future. Although the Igloo Tag is still being managed from a southern location, it arguably represents mechanisms of Inuit self-determination and market control via brand name recognition and authority over intellectual property rights of Inuit arts.

Underlying all of the socioeconomic issues that Inuit communities face in Nunavut is slow, unreliable, and expensive internet connectivity that prevents Inuit artists from fully participating in the broader national and international art markets or locally experimenting with new media formats of expression. Current digital and economic disparities experienced in Nunavut prohibit entrepreneurial growth and restrict artists' access to valuable economic and educational resources. Since the arrival of the internet in 1995, connectivity in the Arctic has been achieved through a litany of short-term governmental initiatives. From high-cost federal grant programs to grassroots non-profit goals, no one entity has been able to achieve equitable access to the internet in the Nunavut. Innovative technological developments have created the means to deploy high-speed broadband and ever-increasing cellular network speeds. The overwhelming cost of implementing such technologies in Arctic communities has been estimated at millions and even billions of dollars. However, equitable, first-mile broadband in Nunavut could support rapid decolonization of the Inuit art market through bolstering community-first initiatives and empowering community voices.

In the article “2017: Indigenous Futures”, authors Kate Morris and Bill Anthes analyze the role of decolonization in the contemporary art world. The authors recognize

the on-going settler political regimes that aim to destabilize Indigenous sovereignty, for example disputed land rights such as the Oka and Ipperwash crises<sup>62</sup> and continual fights over the extraction of resources such as the 2016 protests over the Muskrat Falls hydro project in Labrador.<sup>63</sup> Colonial politics aim to disrupt cultural survivance. Assimilative laws created and implemented by the Government of Canada have been used to facilitate the oppression of Indigenous cultures (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 47). Morris and Anthes rhetorically question what can be done to strengthen and advance decolonization:

The project of decolonization requires that we ask: How can the institutions of the art world — from curatorial practices to theory — be indigenized? How can key concepts, practices, and networks be fashioned to serve Indigenous communities and prerogatives? How might we move beyond the limitation of contemporary discourse, to acknowledge and embrace Indigenous notions of time and temporality, and approaches to art media and practice? How might we forward a global and contemporary art history that recognizes Indigeneity as central and vital in a multi-centred contemporaneity, and how can the very notion of ‘the contemporary’ be reframed to reflect an Indigenous cultural and environmental politics? (7).

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<sup>62</sup> The Oka and Ipperwash crises were land disputes in the 1990s that resulted in violent confrontations between First Nations and the Canadian government.

<sup>63</sup> A Crown corporation of the Newfoundland and Labrador government, Nalcor Energy, is constructing a multi-billion-dollar hydroelectric dam at Muskrat Falls near Happy Valley-Goose Bay, the home of approximately 8,000 Inuit. In 2016 and 2017, protests erupted over concerns that the corporation was not properly managing the risk of contaminating the Churchill River with methylmercury, poisoning the community fish supply and environment. Protests peaked with a nearly two-week hunger strike by Inuit artist Billy Gauthier, which effectively stopped the project until further scientific environmental studies on the contamination were completed.

The answer is systemic change. It is time for change to shift Inuit leadership into positions of control over technological infrastructure so that creative solutions designed by and for Inuit in remote and isolated locations can be implemented and ultimately achieve growth in the arts and crafts sector in Nunavut. It is time for equal and open access to the latest advancements in broadband and ICT so that Nunavummiut can even the playing field in the contemporary arts and utilize these technologies to innovate within the vitally important arts and crafts sector.

Furthermore, to fully support IQ and decolonization efforts such as the Inuit futurisms movement, networks need to be owned and controlled by Inuit communities who develop and distribute Inuit content. As Steve Loft argues in *Coded Territories: Tracing Indigenous Pathways in New Media Art* (2014), through working in new media, Indigenous artists are expanding the depths of visual and oral culture: “[N]ew media production by Aboriginal artists is transformative and transformational: a shapeshifter. It is an act of proprietary self-definition and cultural self-determination” (xvi). Inuit-owned and controlled digital content would support a digital realm of IQ and bolster community knowledge transference and culture through generations. It would also realize equitable access to global entrepreneurship for Inuit through connectedness to new markets.

As Linda Tuhiwai Smith states, “Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges” (36). Communities who own and control infrastructure can determine in which ways internet is used within the local environment, as well as which histories and medias to promote. This control gives communities increasing self-reliance. Taking

power away from English-based, southern-made technologies will increase opportunities to communicate in the various dialects of Inuktitut and enhance the promotion, preservation, and evolution of Inuit language and culture (Nunavut Broadband Task Force). Only by positioning Nunavut at the forefront of ICT access will Nunavummiut artists be able to leverage digital tools to create works, organize for collective action, and engage in global interactions. This research is necessary to achieve systemic and institutional reforms in cultural and communication policy. Inuit-owned ICT infrastructure would empower more community members to engage in new media to make meaningful changes to national and international governing bodies whose policies continue to be rooted in colonial practices. Dismantling the political, historical, and technological ties that conform Inuit visual art to Westernized systems of production and distribution can only be achieved through a strong commitment to decolonization and Indigenization at all levels of decision-making processes.

The Inuit visual arts sector is comprised of dynamic, inspired, and talented artists who collaborate to share Inuit cultural heritage in vibrant and powerful ways. Cultural production and the narratives embedded in Inuit visual art impact the health and well being of communities, the economy of Nunavut, and the preservation of IQ and promotion of identity for generations to come. As artist Barry Pottle explains,

Regardless of the medium they are working in, young Labrador Inuit artists today are creating works of art that challenge and inspire individual viewers, other artists, local communities, and audiences around the world. These artists are savvy, skilled in technique — some are professionally trained and some are self-taught — and they are connected to global communities by social media and other new avenues of communication. Our emerging artists benefit from 21<sup>st</sup> century communication technologies, yet they remain connected to our

communities. Cultural practices, language, life on the land, country food (traditional foods), natural materials, oral histories, and local legends and stories have always pervaded our artistic practices. Such knowledge and experience are evident in the work of the new generation of artists, just as they have been important to earlier generations of Labrador Inuit artists. This generation has listened to, observed, learned from, and respected those who came before them. Each generation of artists influences those that follow, in one long continuum. Throughout our recent history, a key constraint in all Labrador Inuit arts has been how central the representation of culture is to all our arts. In the no-so-distant past, powerful outside influences — from the government and the military to business interests and religion — sought to assimilate, colonize, and eradicate our Inuit culture and society. Yet despite this, we are still here! In the face of immense pressures, generations of community members and artists alike have risen to the challenge of keeping Inuit culture alive, including our artists today. (*Kingullet Kinguvatsait: The Next Generation* 136)

Although Pottle is specifically addressing Inuit artists from Labrador, his sentiments apply to Indigenous Nunavummiut artists who explore creative practice in new media and are inspired by past generations of artists, continuing the narrative of Inuit art and culture. Decolonizing the art market and implementing affordable, equitable high-speed ICT networks strengthens Inuit engagement in rewriting the past, controlling the dissemination of stories and traditional knowledge, creating a unified vision of their future, and providing them with more opportunities to become cultural leaders in a globalized marketplace.

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